A QUAKER READER

For Organ

NED ROREM

BOOSEY & HAWKES

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION.
Nantucket
P.T.M-83-61-C

To the Nantucket Historical Association

A QUAKER READER

Eleven Pieces for Organ

Sincerely

Ned Rorem

Ned Rorem

$9.50

1983

Boosey & Hawkes

This work was commissioned by Miss Alice Tully and composed for Leonard Raver. The first performance, in Alice Tully Hall, New York City, on February 2, 1977, was by Leonard Raver.

1. **First-Day Thoughts**
2. **Mary Dyer Did Hang As A Flag**
3. **Evidence of Things Not Seen**
4. **There Is a Spirit That Delights To Do No Evil**
5. **The World of Silence**
6. **Bewitching Attire of The Most Charming Simplicity**
7. **A Secret Power**
8. **No Darkness At All**
9. **One Sigh Rightly Begotten**
10. **Return Home To Within**
11. **Ocean of Light**

Playing time: *ca.* 30 minutes.

COMPOSER'S PREFACE

"I was moved also to cry against all sorts of music which stirred up people's minds to vanity," said George Fox. Two centuries later another famous Quaker, the poet Whittier, hoped that no "deeptoned organ" might disturb his thoughts. In our time Elizabeth Vining speaks of the "religious distractions of ritual music". Yet Quakers as a group, unlike Puritans, never claimed music to be injurious, only superfluous, to meditation.

Myself, raised in Quaker silence, I craved Catholic sound. Is that why some invisible hand urged me as a child toward the arts? To this day, although Quaker tenets influence my reason, my fancy is more sparked by the fire of the Mass. Being unreligious so far as ordered belief is concerned, it is not the purpose but the pomp – not salvation but sensuality – which attracts me in worship.

To be a birthright member of the Society of Friends and to be a composer is to embody the paradox of reconciling implicit quiet with explicit sound. Yet, though I have set to music all manner of profane and sacred texts, from Sappho through Byron to Roethke, not to mention huge chunks from the Testaments and from Roman Liturgy both in Latin and English, never in any professional way have I linked Quakerism to music, partly because I take Quakerism so for granted, partly because there is no singable Quaker literature.

But if there exists no Quaker music, there can be music by a Quaker. And if my religion means silence while my craft means sound, that craft (that sound) has always very consciously been devoted to banishing the noise which forms an ever vaster cloud between humdrum and mystical realities.

With the present suite my intention has been to meld, finally and practically, my nominal religion with my craft. Since no Song is used – no actual musicalizing of words – each piece is headed with an epigraph from Friends' writings, many of which, in their urge toward pacifism as solution, extol absolute quiet and absolute light. The music represents a blaze of silence.

I am indebted to Jessamyn West's invaluable *The Quaker Reader* from which is fashioned much of my own nostalgic primer. Here are some notes on each movement:

1. First-Day Thoughts

"In calm and cool and silence, once again
I find my old accustomed place among
My brethren, where, perchance, no human tongue
Shall utter words; where never hymn is sung,
Nor deep-toned organ blown . . . "

– John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

"Whittier", says Jessamyn West, "joined not one but two unpopular causes: poetry and abolition. The cause of poetry is always suspect; and abolitionists in the Civil War period were about as popular as Freedom Riders today." John Greenleaf Whittier wrote *First Day Thoughts* in 1852 when he was forty-five. His verses evoke my own First Days (Quaker Sundays or meeting days) which, however, were confined to a Chicago childhood often colored by a wandering mind.

2. Mary Dyer did hang as a flag . . .

"Mary Dyer did hang as a flag for others to take example by",
said General Atherton, one of her persecutors.

Only in America did Quakers ever receive outright death sentences, as opposed to prison terms. In *Mary Dyer of Rhode Island* Horatio Rogers describes that woman's career of fighting for liberty of worship. She never gave up, never offered the public repentance which might have saved her, and died on the gallows of Boston Common one June morning in 1660. Everywhere is a whir of wind, the ever-weakening C-sharp pedal trill depicting the *entrechat* spasm of the martyr's feet, and her silent scream.

3. Evidence of Things Not Seen

". . . he that lives to live ever, never fears dying. Nor can the Means be terrible to him that heartily believes the End. For tho' Death be a Dark Passage, it leads to Immortality, and that's recompense enough for Suffering of it. And yet Faith Lights us, even through the Grave, being the Evidence of Things not seen. And this is the Comfort of the Good, that the Grave cannot hold them, and that they live as soon as they die. For Death is no more than a Turning of us over from Time to Eternity. Death then, being the Way and Condition of Life, we cannot love to live, if we cannot bear to die . . . "

— William Penn

In 1693 William Penn published a collection called *Some Fruits of Solitude*. His fierce yet comforting phrases on Death are quoted at some length under my third title, *Evidence of Things Not Seen*. Like George Fox's Ocean of Darkness is Penn's Dark Passage, and both of these thinkers — these doers — extolled the bright nutritive total tranquility at the core of all storms.

4. "There Is a Spirit That Delights to Do No Evil . . . "

— from the dying words of James Naylor (1660)

This piece comes from a little tune, on a George Peel poem, composed in Paris twenty-two years ago. A fragment of the tune was later used in my *Prayers and Responses*. Today it is bestowed as a balm to James Naylor who perished so painfully in London the same year as Mary Dyer in Boston.

5. The World of Silence

"There must be a hush from the din of the world's noises before the soul can hear the inward Voice; . . . a closing of the eyes to the glare and dazzle of the world's sights before the inward eye can see that which is eternally Real . . . "

— Rufus Jones

"Man and mystery first meet in silence," declares the Swiss philosopher, Max Picard. "The sphere of faith and the sphere of silence belong together . . . When there is only noise in and around man, it is difficult to approach the mystery. When the layer of silence is missing, the extraordinary easily becomes connected with the ordinary." Yet from a strictly physical standpoint, is not the "silent world" beneath the sea in fact a din of fish squawks and liquid cyclones, like the deafening Niagara of our own bloodstream? One of my definitions of silence: Activity within the brain during the low-decibel hour of a Friends' meeting. The activity is not always serene (could it be today?) and sometimes calls forth noisy chords.

6. "Bewitching attire of the most charming simplicity . . . "

— Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur,
on Quaker dress in Nantucket, *ca.* 1770

No coincidence comes as a surprise when I'm at work. Thus, while composing *A Quaker Reader* in Nantucket, I happened to open Crèvecoeur's *Letters From An American Farmer*. Instantly I fell upon the alluring essay about Nantucket Quakers 150 years ago. Their dress, their self-reliance, their grace and wit, their gift (in the absence of songs or cards) to spin yarns about whaling trips, their cheerful flirtations, all that seemed so close to home that it entered the music as naturally as the continual cry of the gulls.

7. A Secret Power

"When I came into the silent assemblies . . . I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart."

— Robert Barclay

Like much programmatic music, this little chaconne (a 6-note ground thrice stated) was named after the fact, the way babies are named. But if the music did not emerge from the prose, the context for *A Secret Power* is nonetheless inspiring in itself. Robert Barclay (1648-1690), a Scotsman who arrived at Quakerism via other faiths which gave him "impressions contrary to the principle of Love", said further: "When I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up . . . "

8. " . . . No darkness at all . . . "

"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all . . . "
— Walt Whitman, recalling fifty years later how
Elias Hicks thus quoted Christ

Here the cycle seemed to need something spare. Recalling a little hymn I wrote several seasons back, I renotated it for the purpose, just as Whitman recalled, and doubtless reworded, from a half-century earlier the harangue by Elias Hicks who cried that God is light, and that in Him was "No Darkness at all." Which explains the title. (How hard it is to be easy! During long years as a composer I've scarcely grazed the simplicity — call it honest economy, if you will — which surely inhabits the richest art.)

9. One Sigh Rightly Begotten

Again William Penn. He wrote: "If you confine Christ's dwelling to a local heaven" (I thought of naming this movement 'A Local Heaven') "you are ignorant of that which is the greatest joy that can be: Christ dwells in the heart" (but since, as I see it, the heart too is a local heaven, the title would have carried no weight beyond itself - no afterthought). Penn adds: "Nothing reaches the heart but what is from the heart, or pierces the conscience but what comes from a living conscience . . . " Also: "Never marry but for love, but see that thou lovest what is lovely." And finally: "One sigh, rightly begotten, outweighs a whole volume of self-made prayers . . . ", an *aperçu* both tender and tough, and ever so musical.

10. Return Home to Within

"Return home to within: sweep your Houses all. The Groat is there, the little Leaven is there, the Grain of the Mustard Seed you will see which the Kingdom of God is like . . . and here you will see your Teacher, not removed into a Corner, but present when you are upon your Beds and about your Labour, convincing, instructing, leading, correcting, judging and giving Peace to all that love and follow Him."

— Richard Howgill, *ca.* 1670

Is the recurring pedal D a calling horn, a lonely dinner bell from the "other side"? The title is from Howgill, but Boutroux too speaks of "The beyond that is within," and the poet Vaughn wrote: "My soul, there is a country far beyond the stars." The longest road leads into our own Heart of Darkness, and, despite Hicks' contention, that road moves through an ocean of black . . .

11. Ocean of Light

" . . . there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness."

— George Fox

. . . or so thought George Fox. But his thought, like that of all strong innovators, was of necessity optimistic. "I should have a sense of all conditions," wrote Fox early in his career. "How else should I speak to all conditions; and in this I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God; and I had great openings."

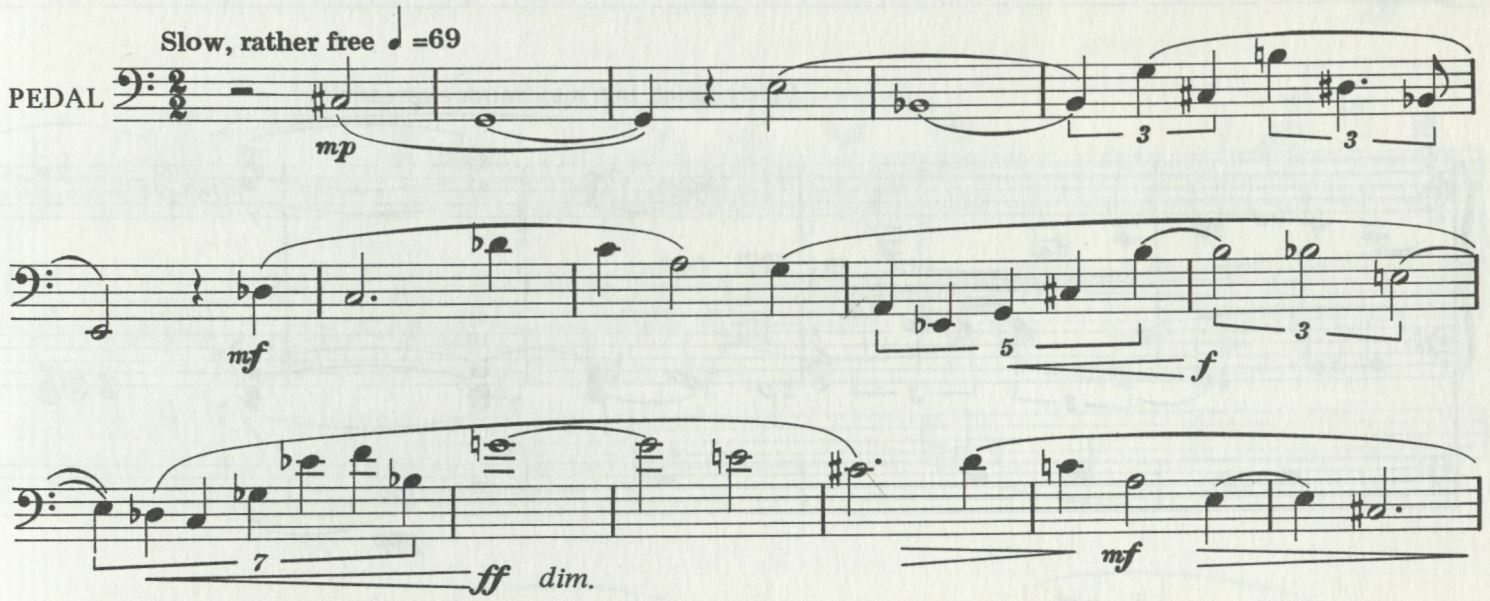
NED ROREM, Nantucket, October 1976

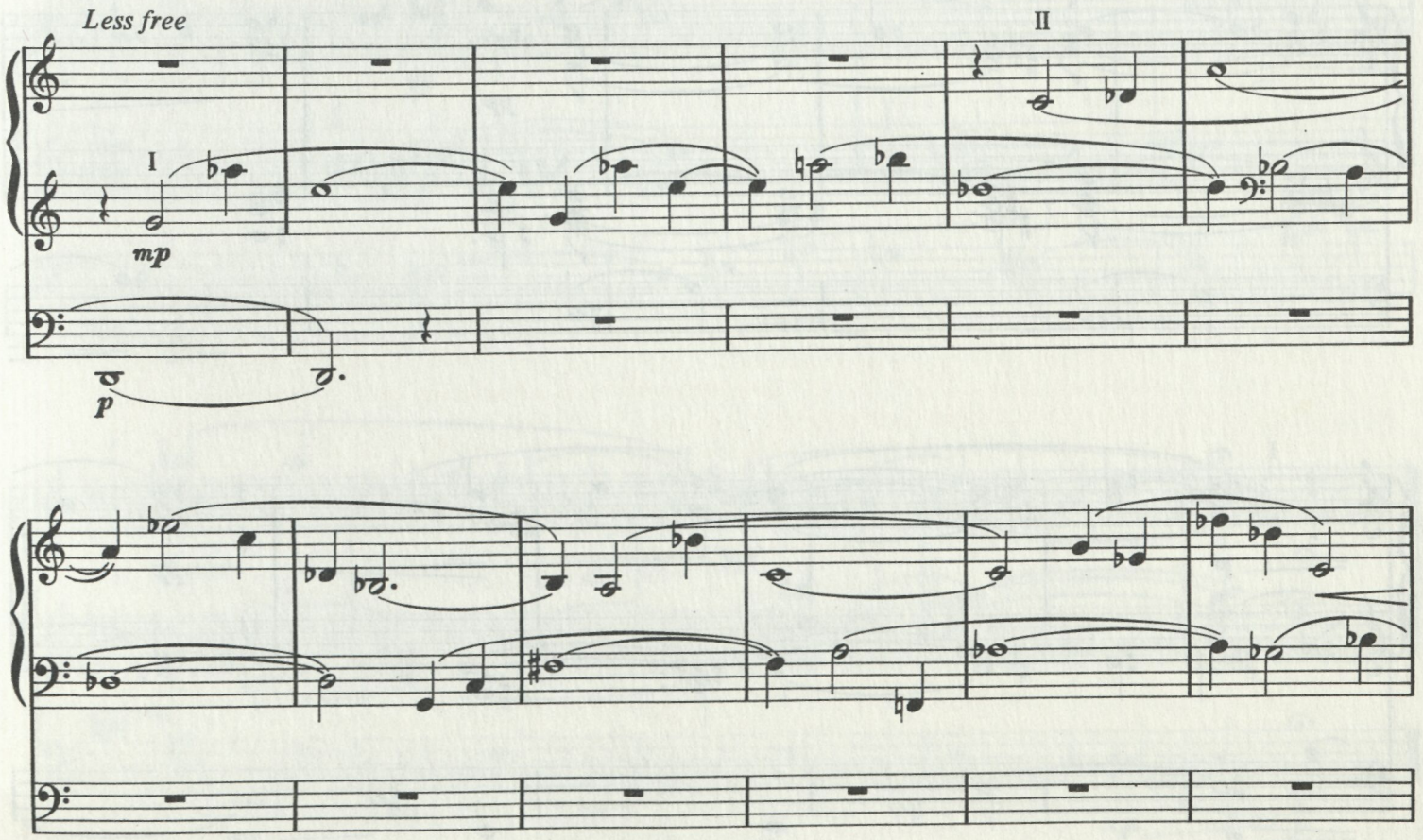
A QUAKER READER

1. First-Day Thoughts

"In calm and cool and silence, once again
I find my old accustomed place among
My brethren, where, perchance, no human tongue
Shall utter words; where never hymn is sung,
Nor deep-toned organ blown . . . "
— John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

NED ROREM





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B. Org. 27

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mf

mp *dim.*

Fairly strict, but maximum expressivity

III

ppp *espr.*

3 3

ppp

II

pp

I

p

p

pp

pp

fff

fff

ff

f

f espr.

rit.

mf

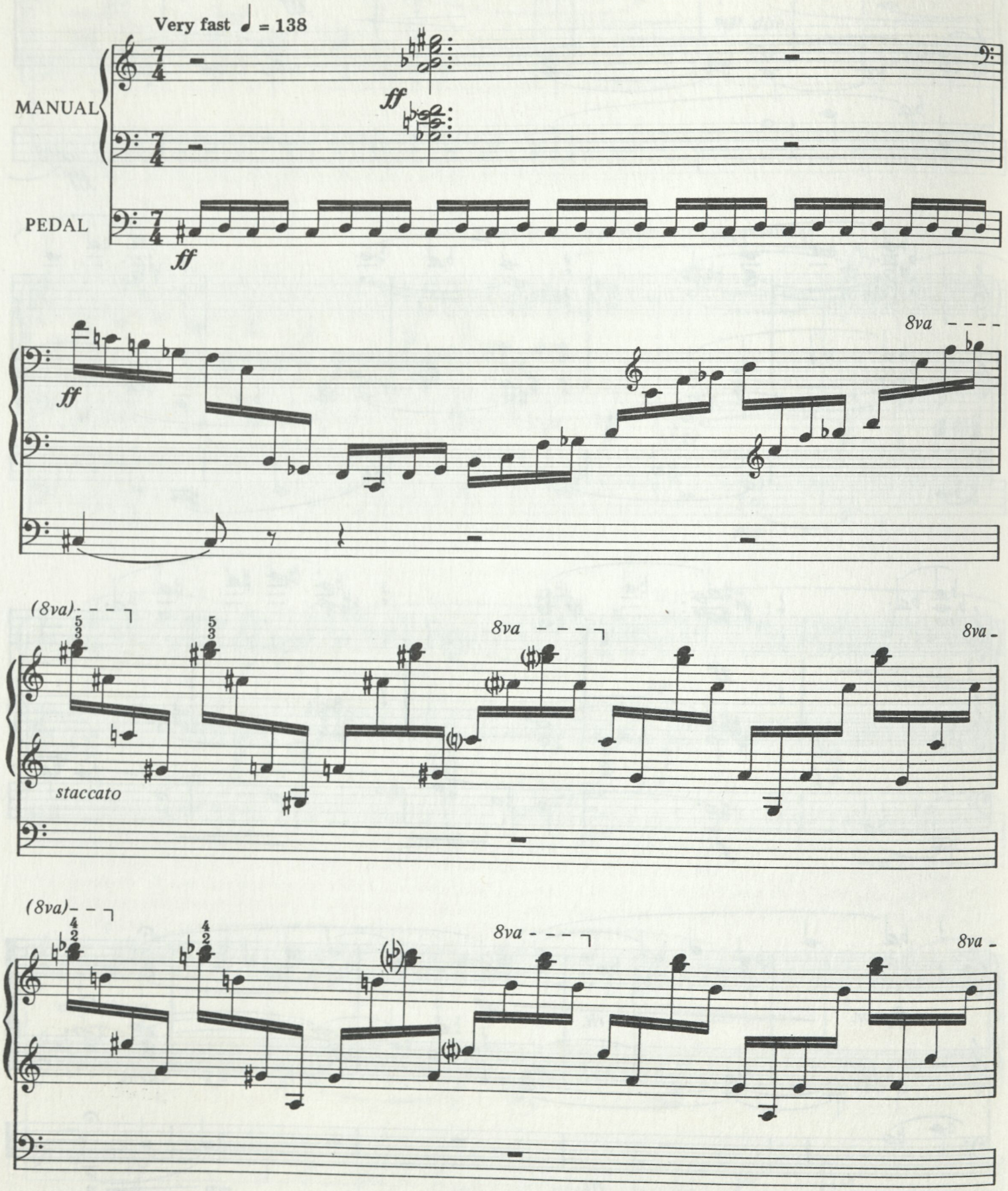
rit.

mp

p

2. Mary Dyer did hang as a flag...

"Mary Dyer did hang as a flag for others to take example by", said General Atherton, one of her persecutors. Dyer died for religious freedom in Massachusetts in 1660.



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B. Org. 27

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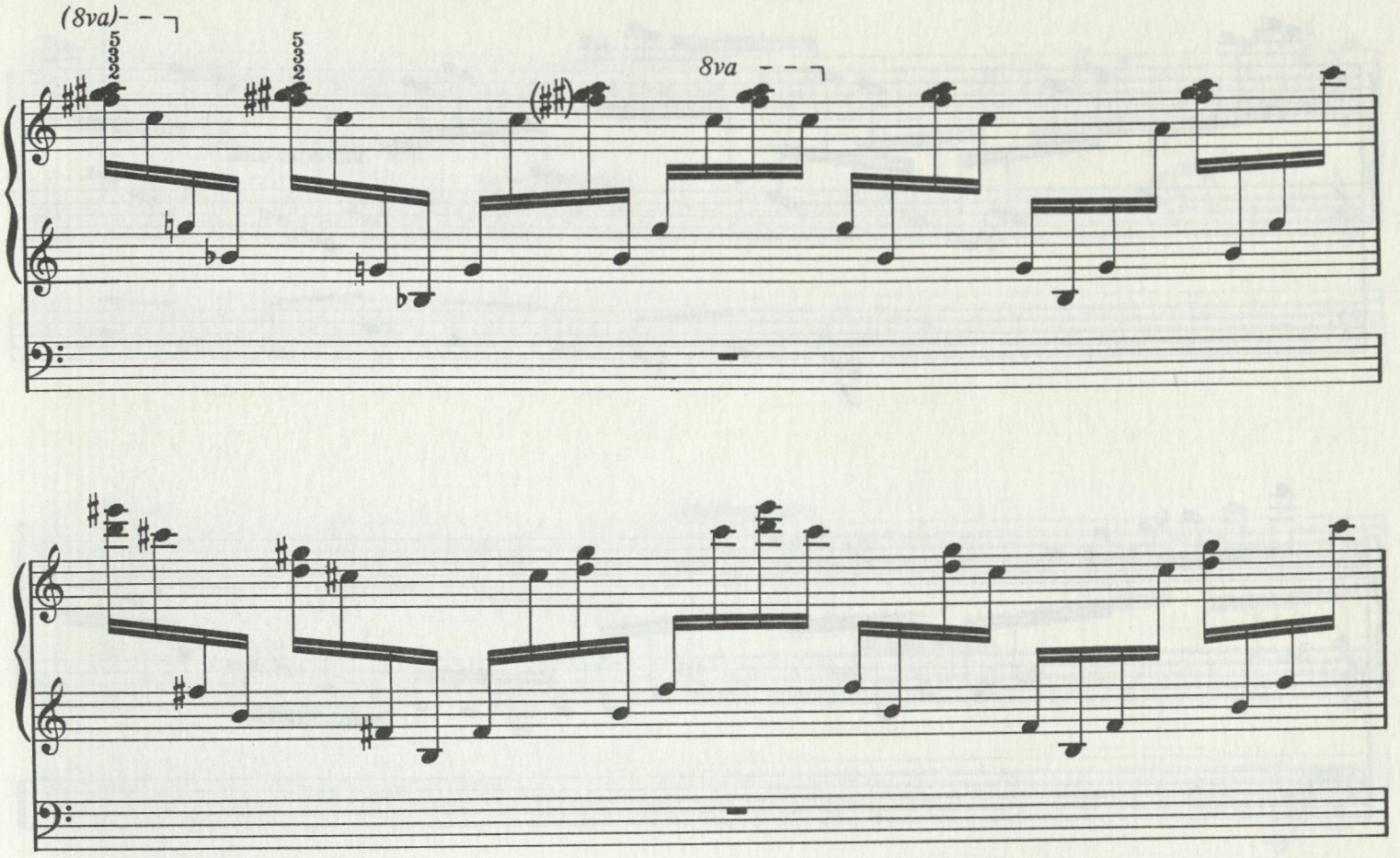
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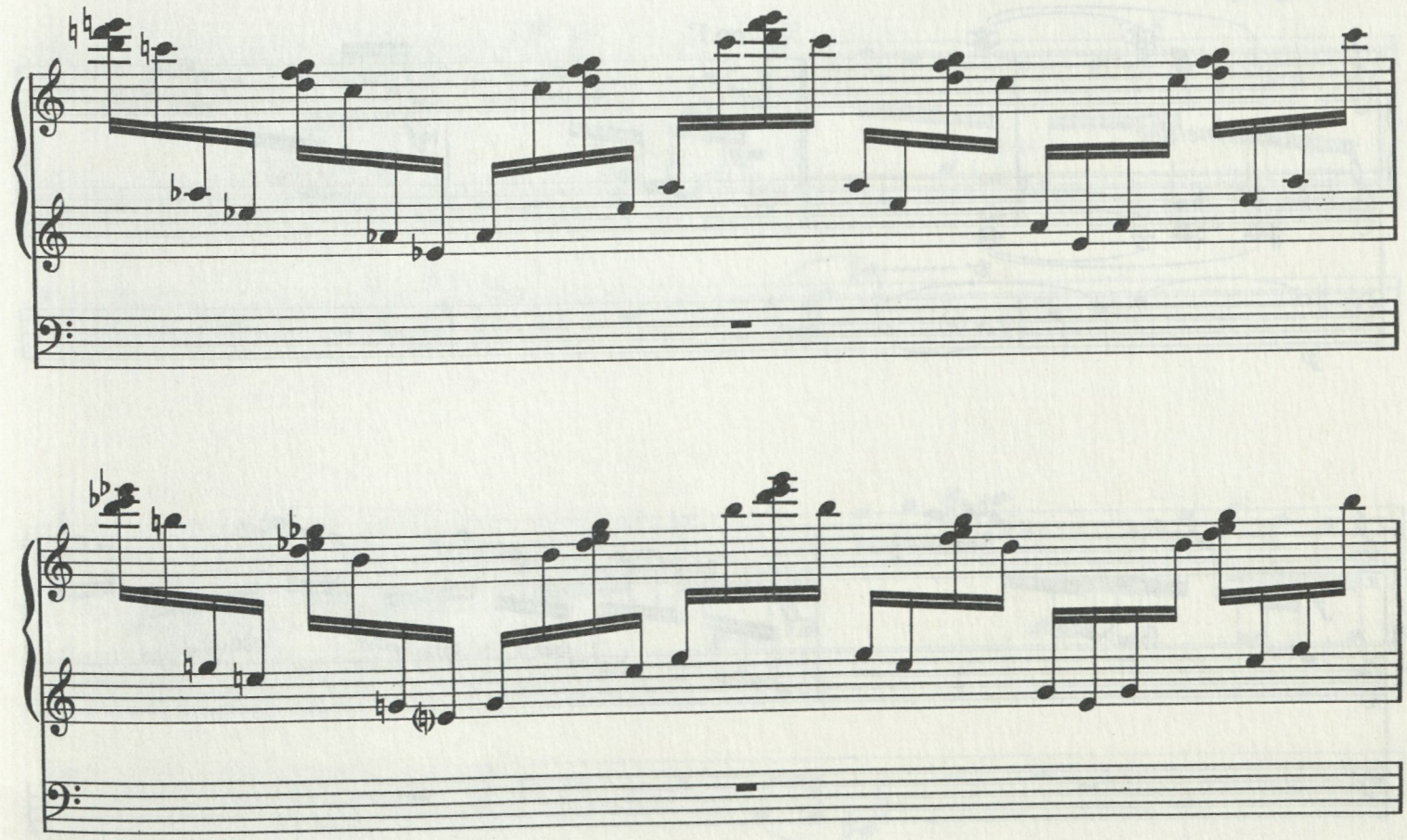


f

Slightly slower

p *melting*

tr

p

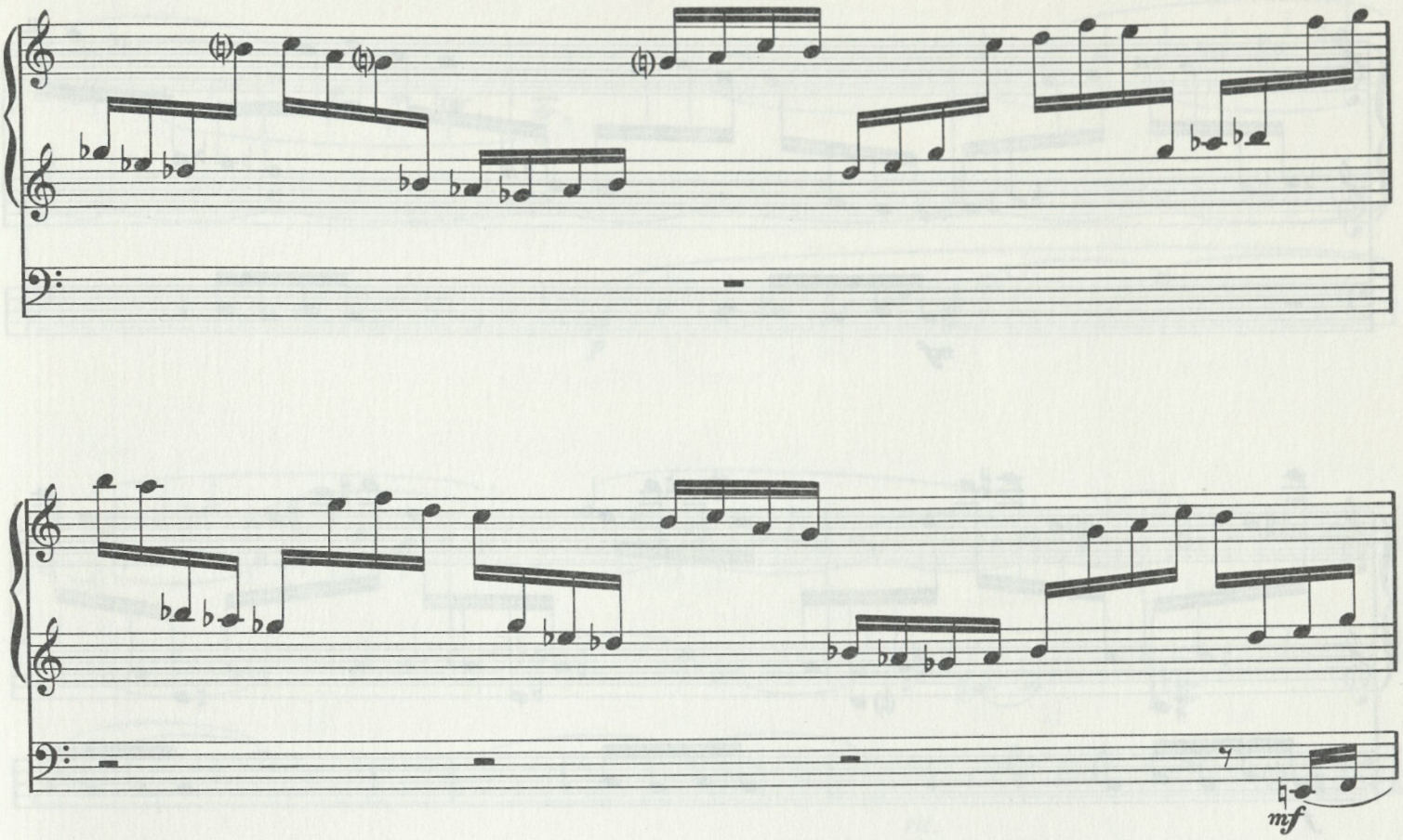
Tempo I°

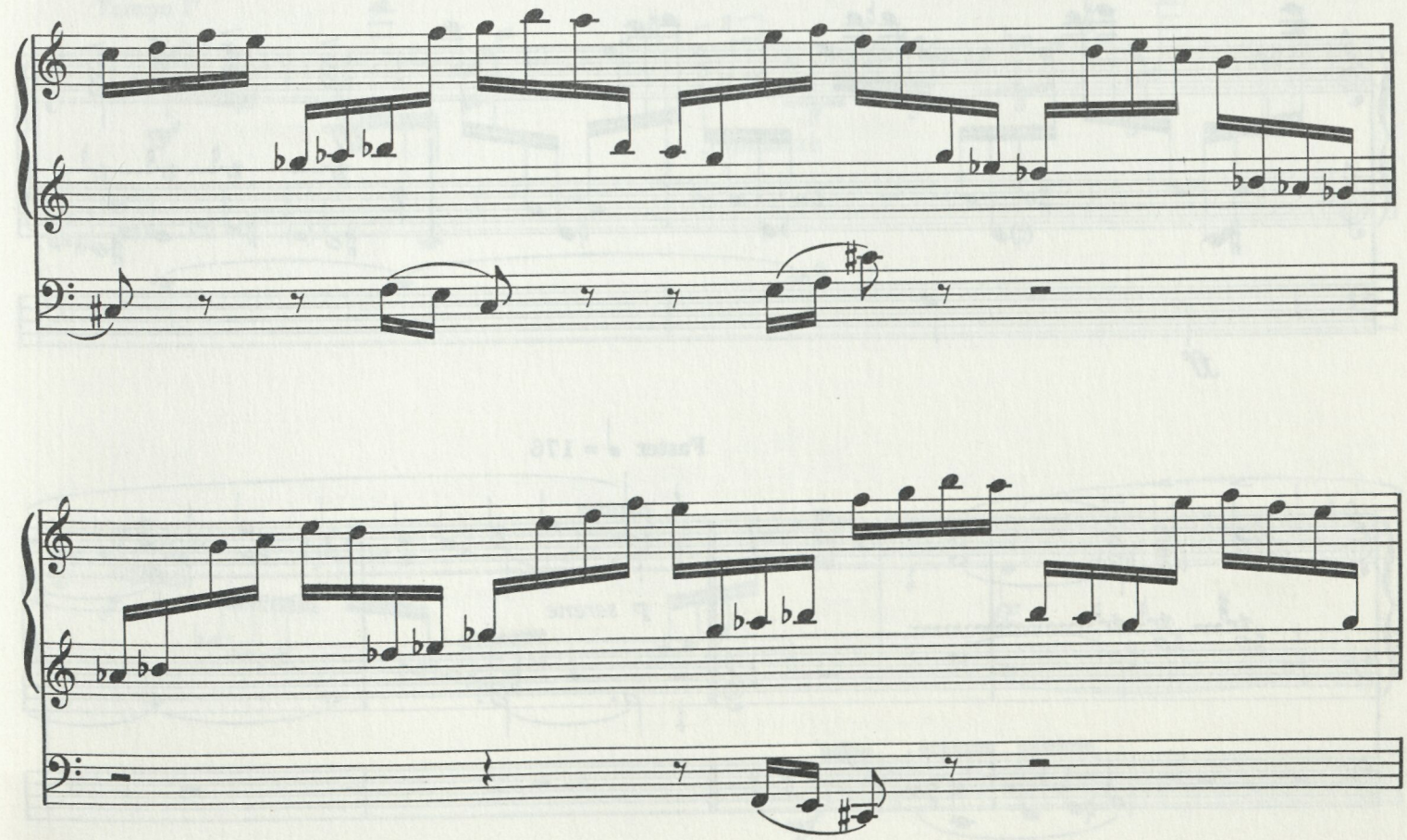
mp

mf

f

ff





B. Org. 27

mf

f

ff

fff

Faster ♩ = 176

p serene

p

rit.

rit.

Tempo I°

mf

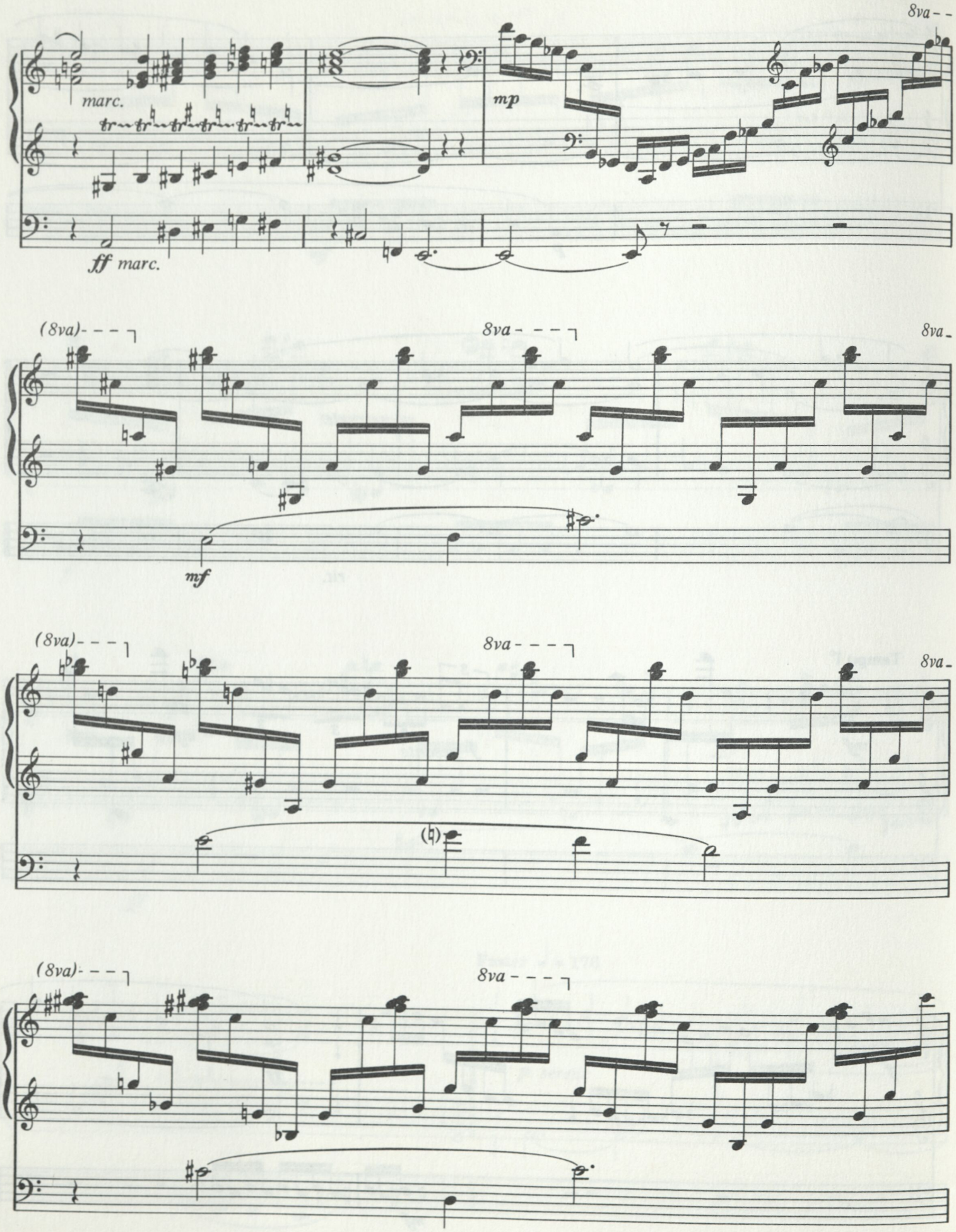
f pesante

mf

f

ff

mf


8va
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mp
ff marc.
(8va)
8va
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mf
(8va)
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8va
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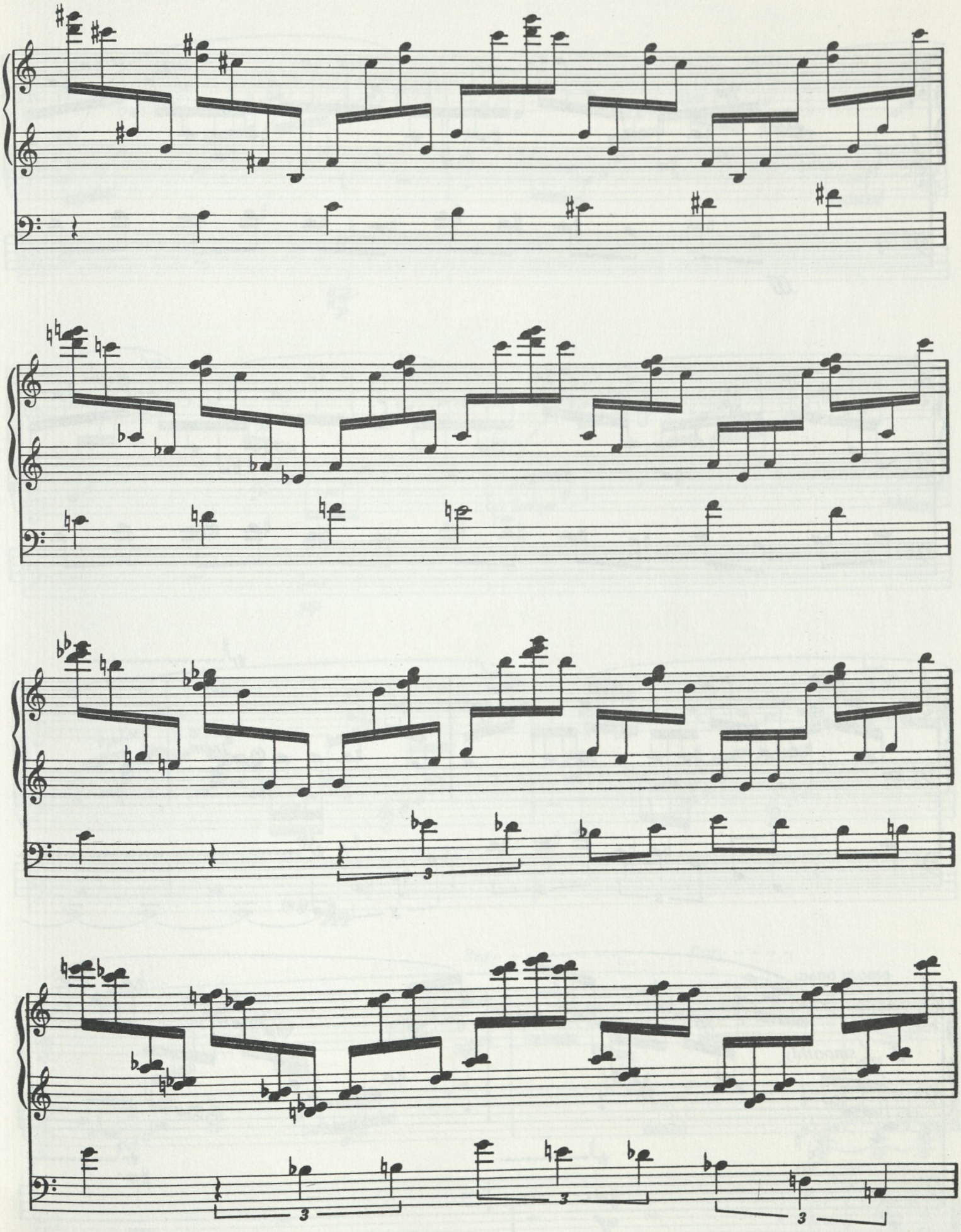
8va


3
3
3
3

fff

fff

tr

trem.

tr

3

3

3

3

f smoothly

mf

tr

mf

tr

mp

mp

p

tr

p

pp

tr

pp

ppp

ppp

8va

8va

meno mosso

fff

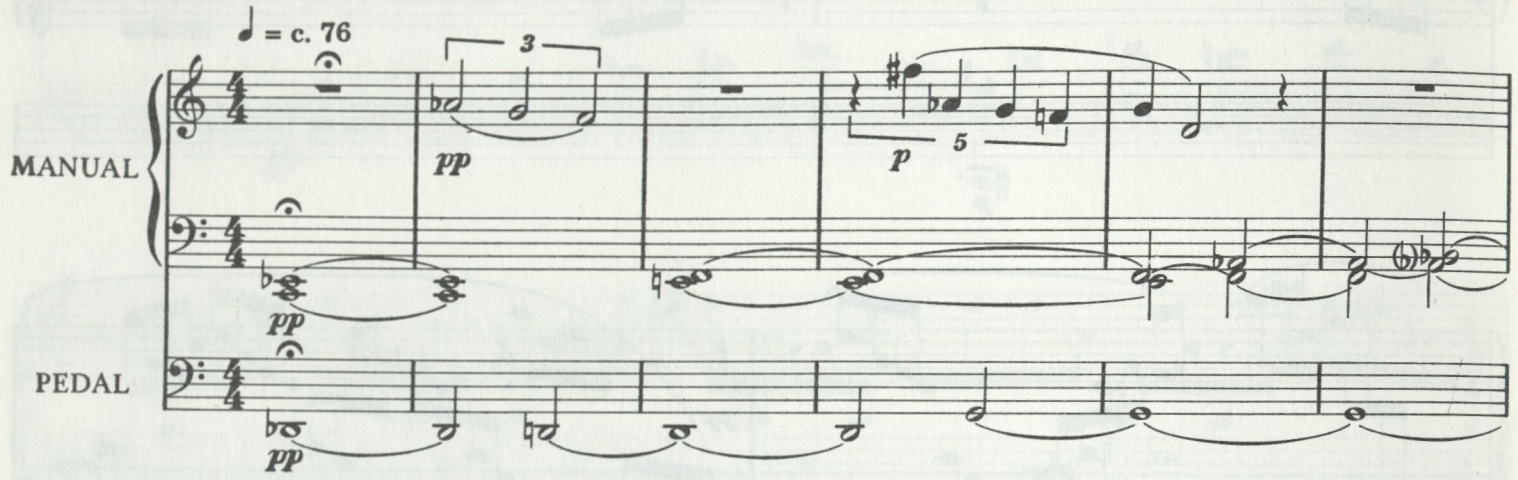
fff

fff

3. Evidence of Things Not Seen

". . . he that lives to live ever, never fears dying. Nor can the Means be terrible to him that heartily believes the End. For tho' Death be a Dark Passage, it leads to Immortality, and that's Recompense enough for Suffering of it. And yet Faith Lights us, even through the Grave, being the Evidence of Things not seen. And this is the Comfort of the Good, that the Grave cannot hold them, and that they live as soon as they die. For Death is no more than a Turning of us over from Time to Eternity. Death then, being the Way and Condition of Life, we cannot love to live, if we cannot bear to die. . . "

— William Penn (from *Some Fruits of Solitude*, 1693)



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B. Org. 27

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yearning

mf

mp

mp

Move Ahead

8va

f

ff

mf

(8va)

trem.

ff

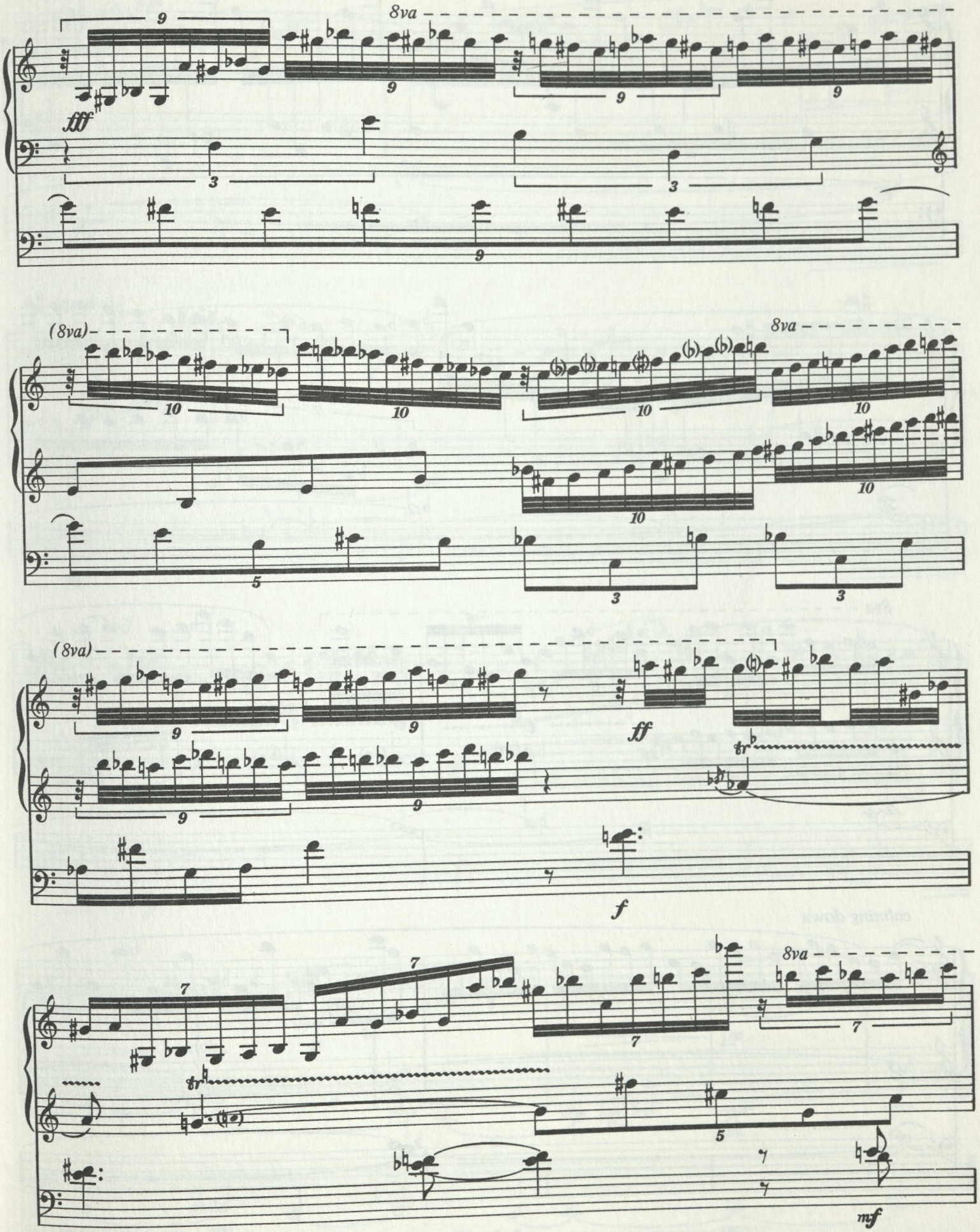
8va

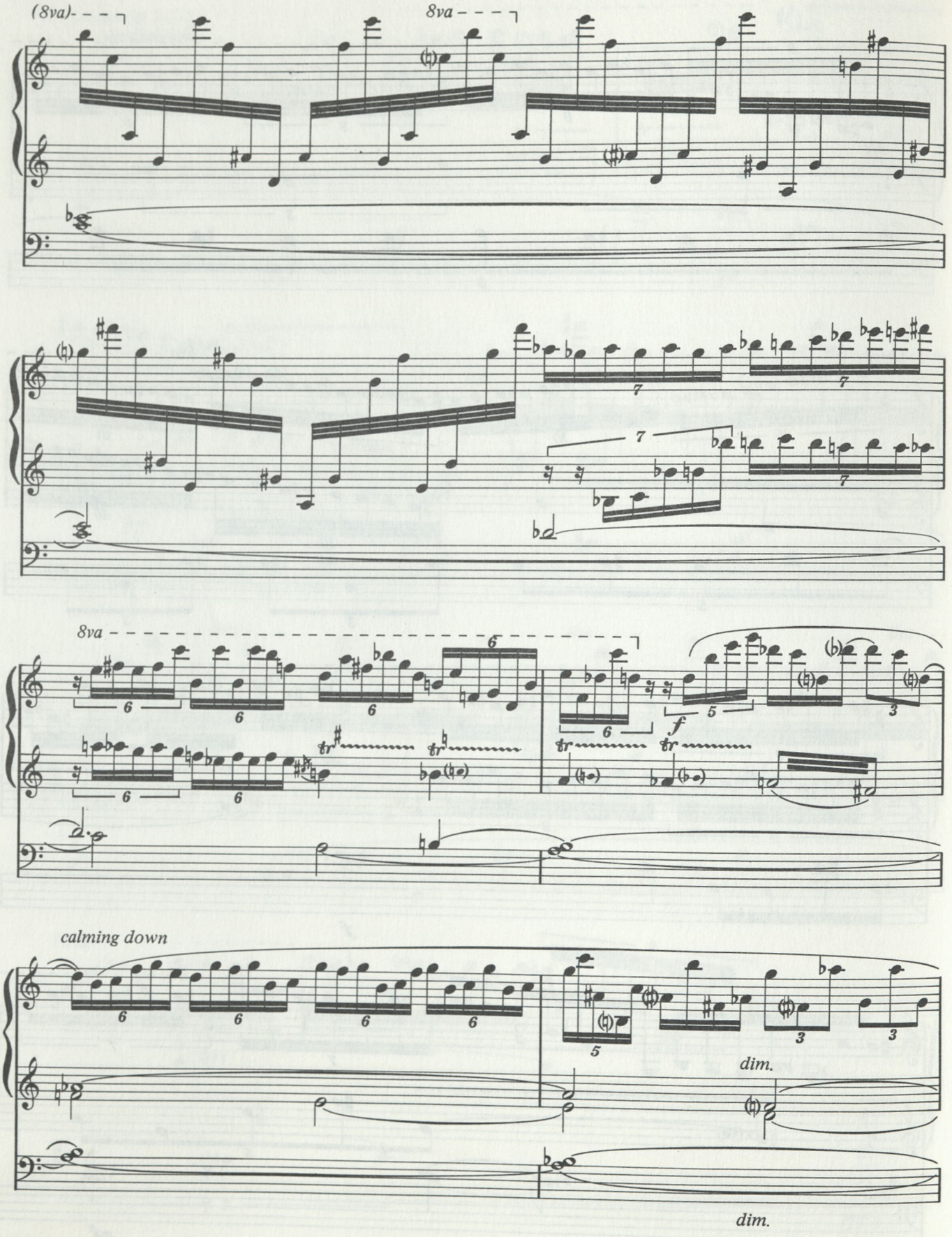
8va

8va

(8va)

fff


8va
fff
(8va)
8va
ff
f
(8va)
8va
mf


(8va)
8va
8va
calming down
dim.
dim.

tranquil

mf

mp

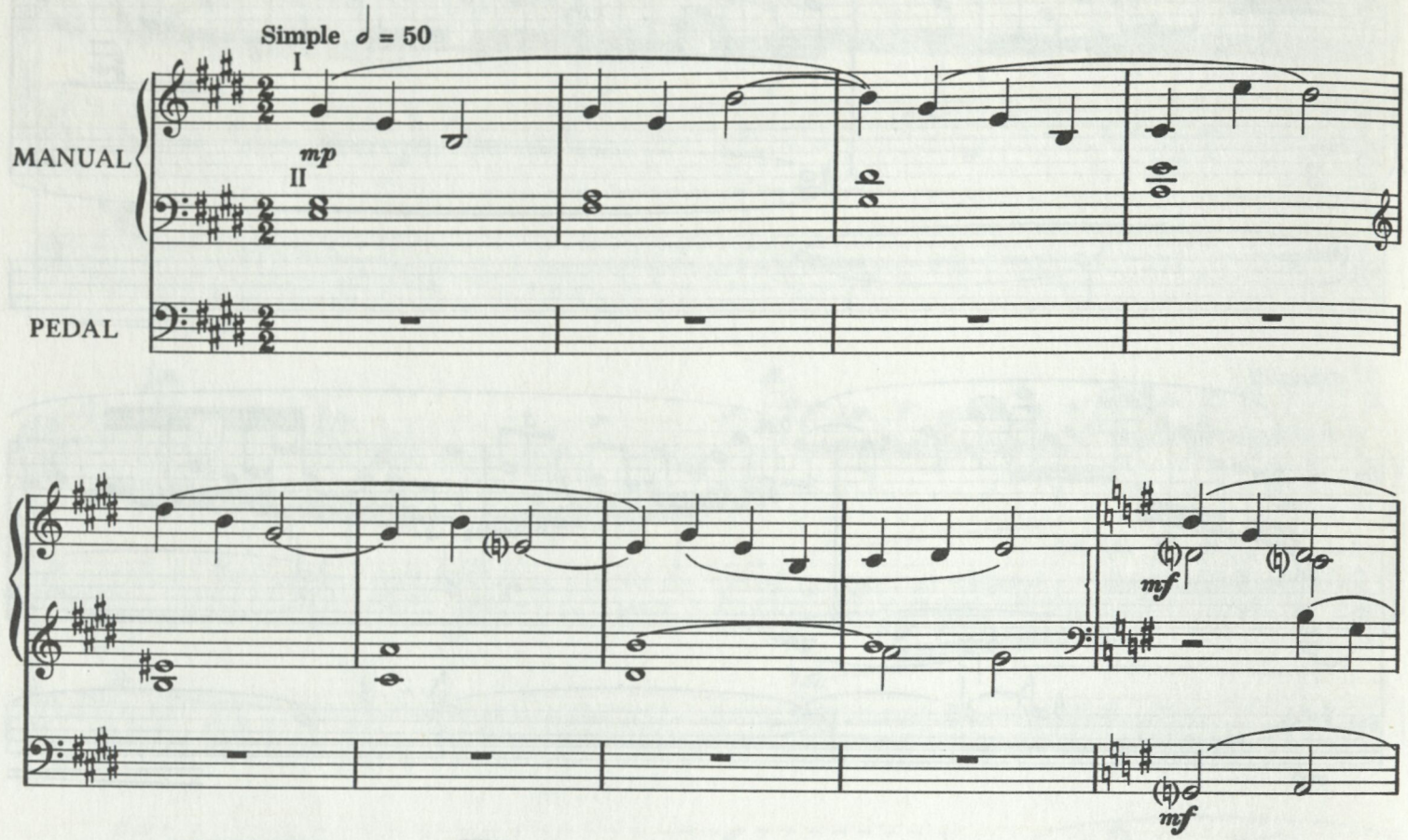
p

pp

ppp

4. "There Is a Spirit That Delights to Do No Evil . . ."

– from the dying words of James Naylor (1660)



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mp

rit.

rit.

a tempo

mf

mf

f

dim. e rit.

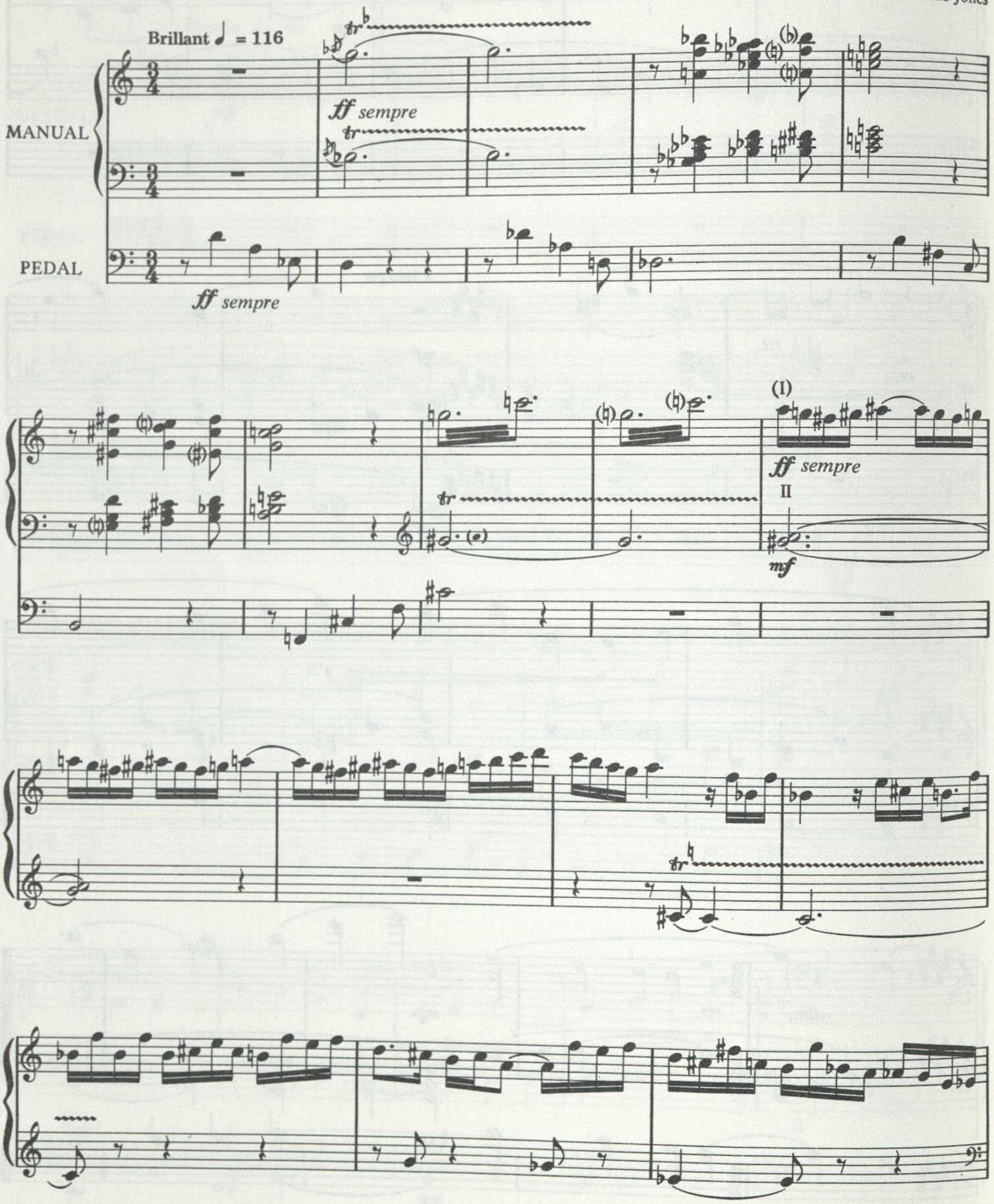
mp

mp

dim. e rit.

5. The World of Silence

"There must be a hush from the din of the world's noises before the soul can hear the inward Voice; . . . a closing of the eyes to the glare and dazzle of the world's sights before the inward eye can see that which is eternally Real . ."
—Rufus Jones



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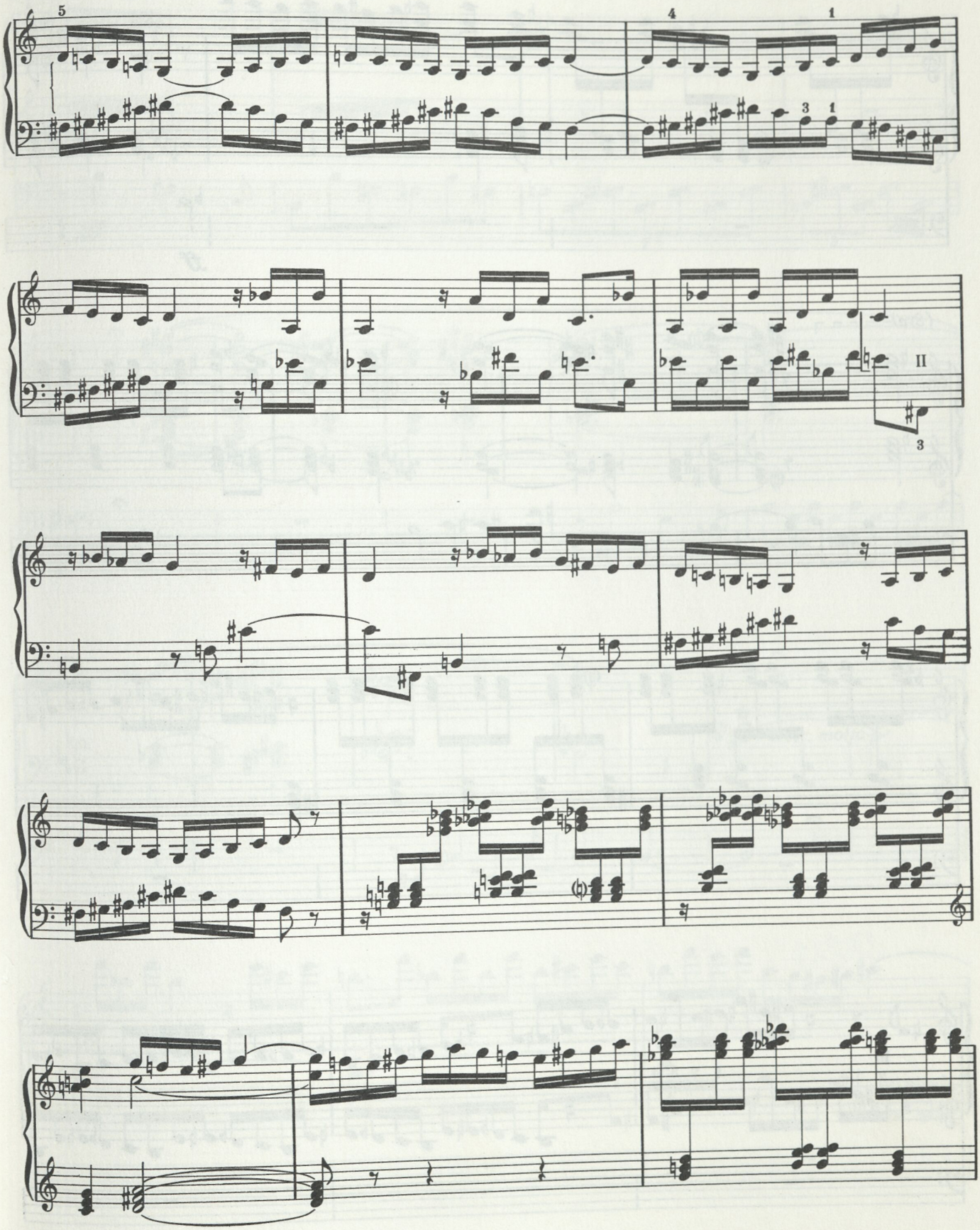


8va

ff

(8va)

III

1 2 3 4

fff

7

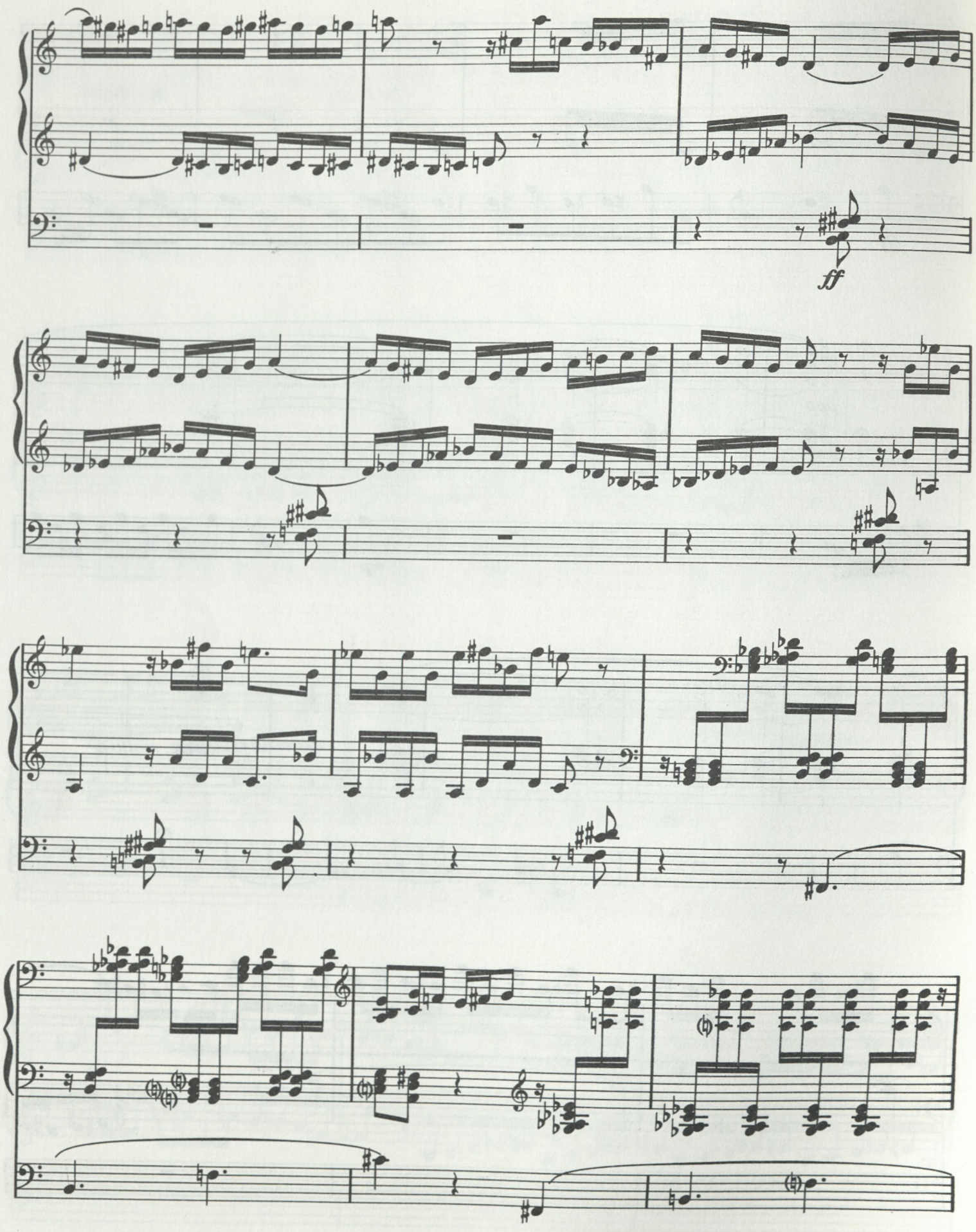
3

ppp

mp

cresc. molto

ff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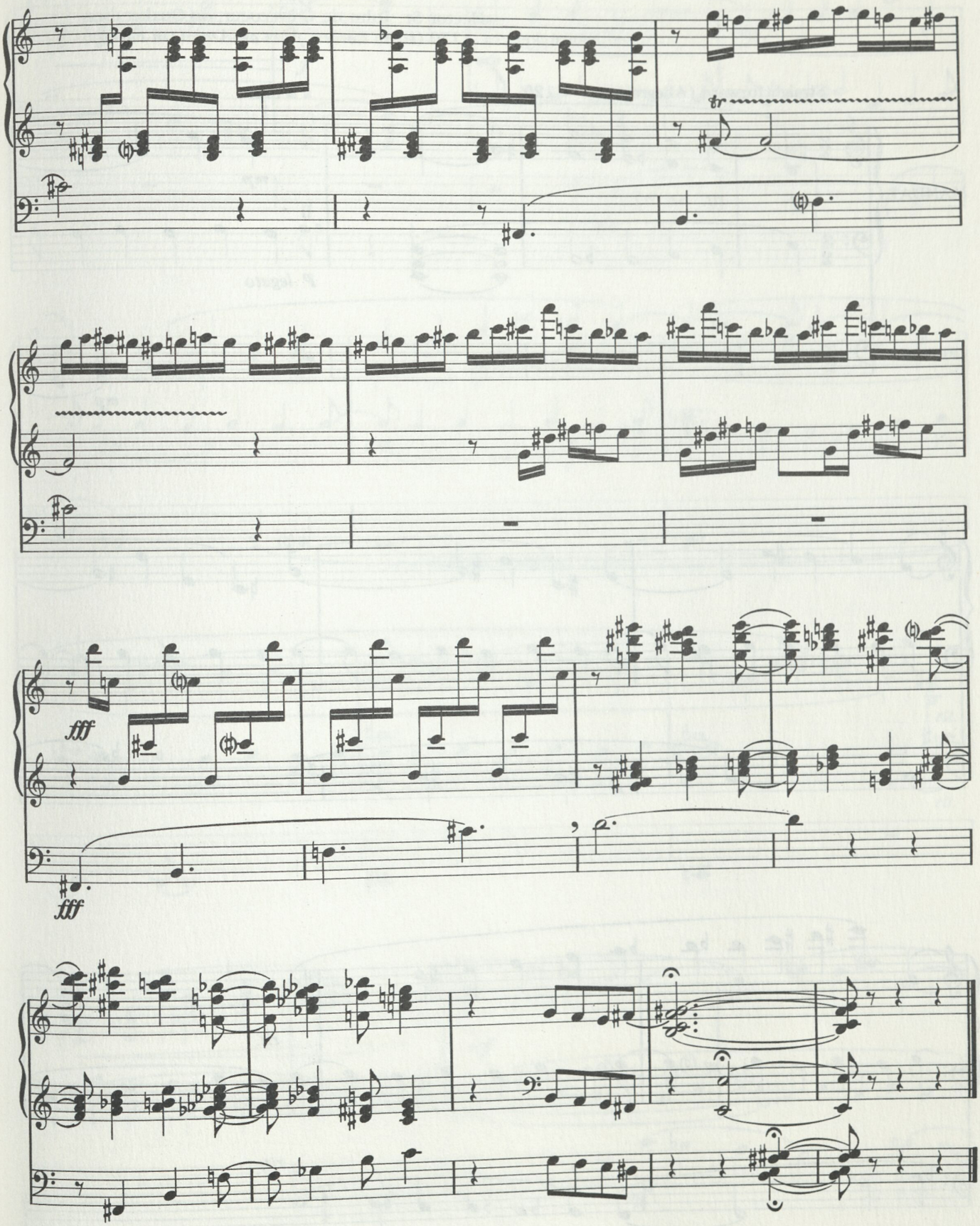
tr
fff
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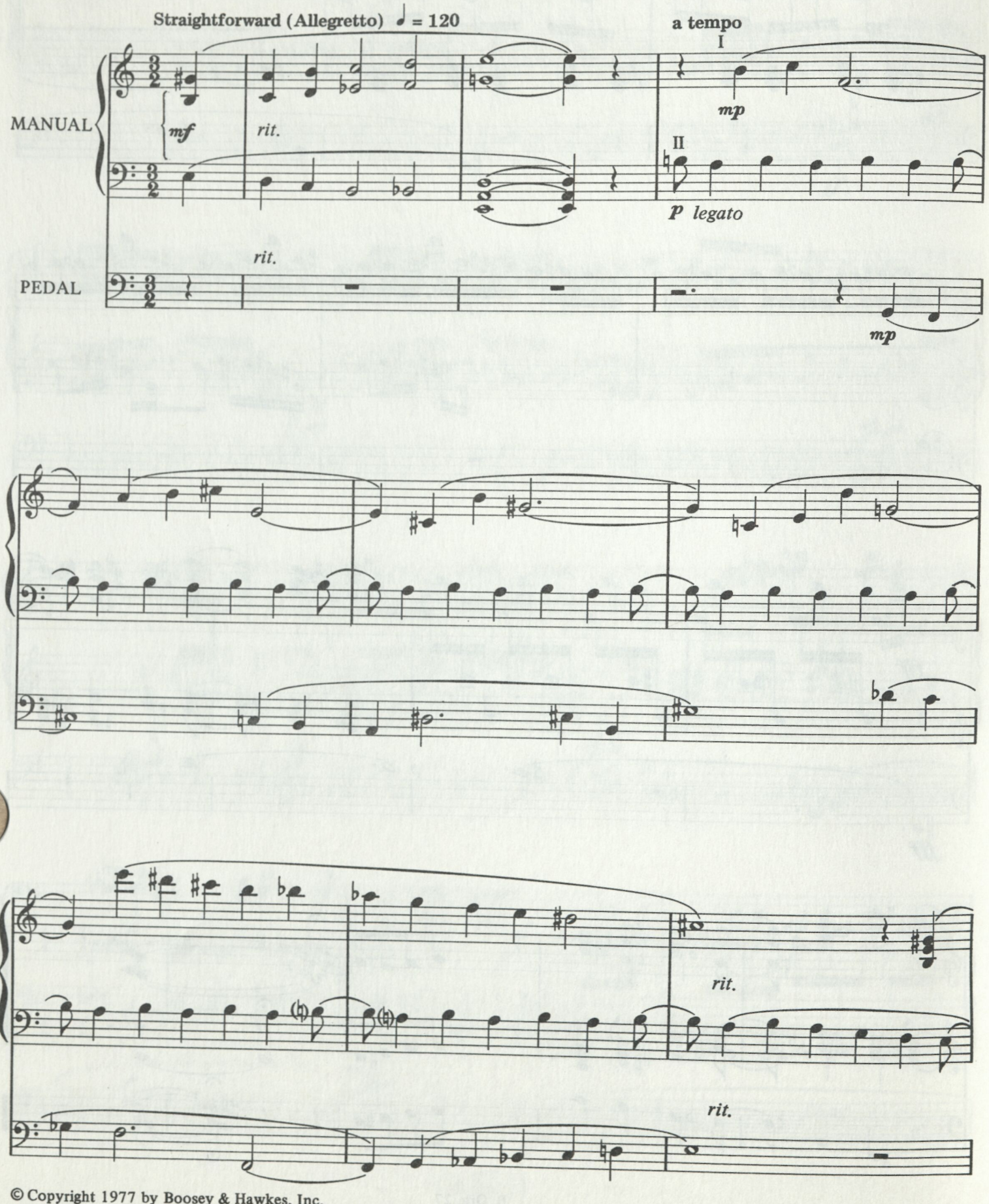
6. "Bewitching attire of the most charming simplicity..."

– Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, on Quaker dress
in Nantucket, ca. 1770 (from *Letters from an American Farmer*)



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B. Org. 27

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a tempo

f

mp

mp

rit.

rit.

a tempo

mf

mf

f

f

molto dim.

rit.

a tempo

mp

rit.

mp

rit.

mf

f

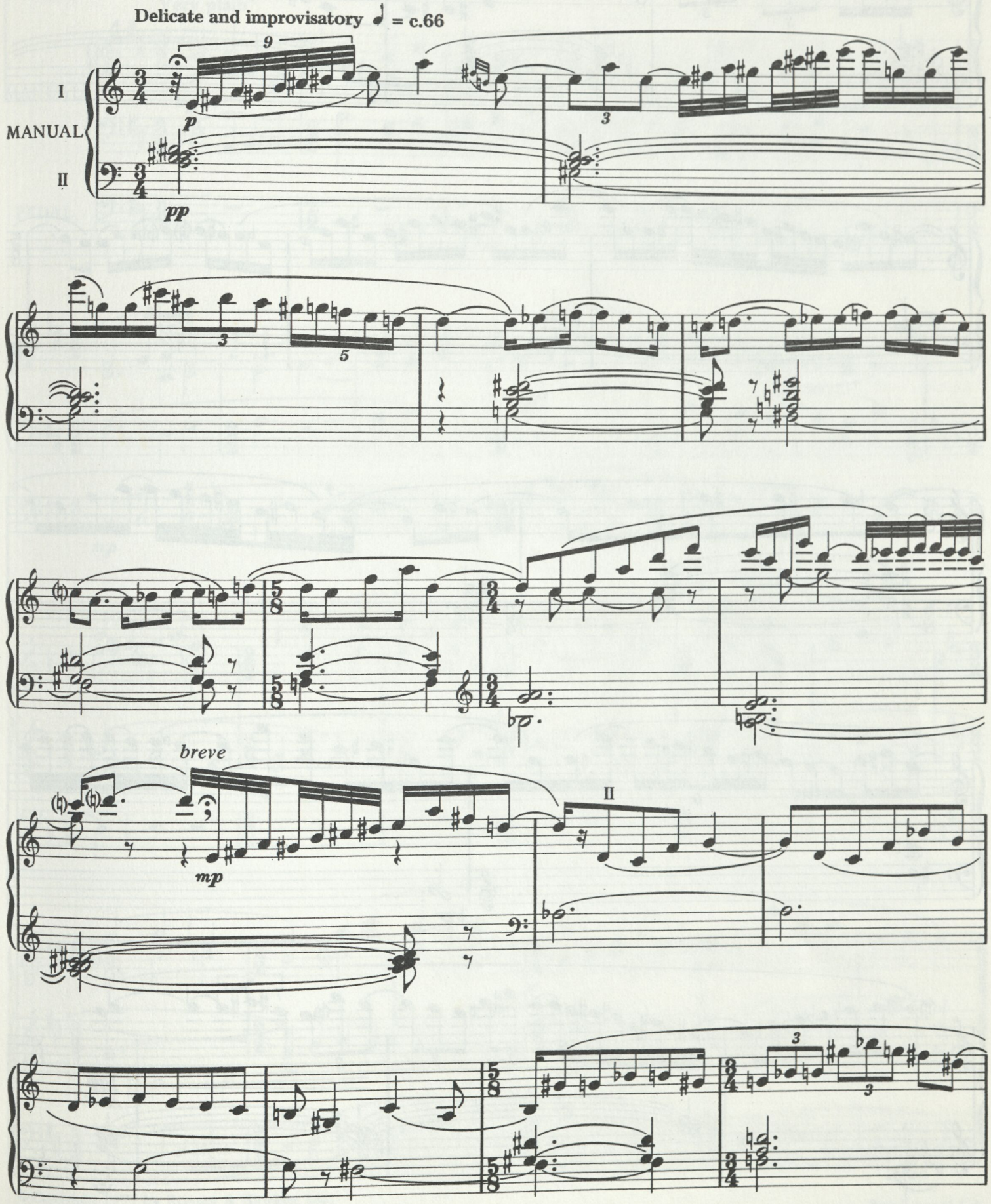
rit.

mf

f

7. A Secret Power

"When I came into the silent assemblies . . . I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart."
— Robert Barclay



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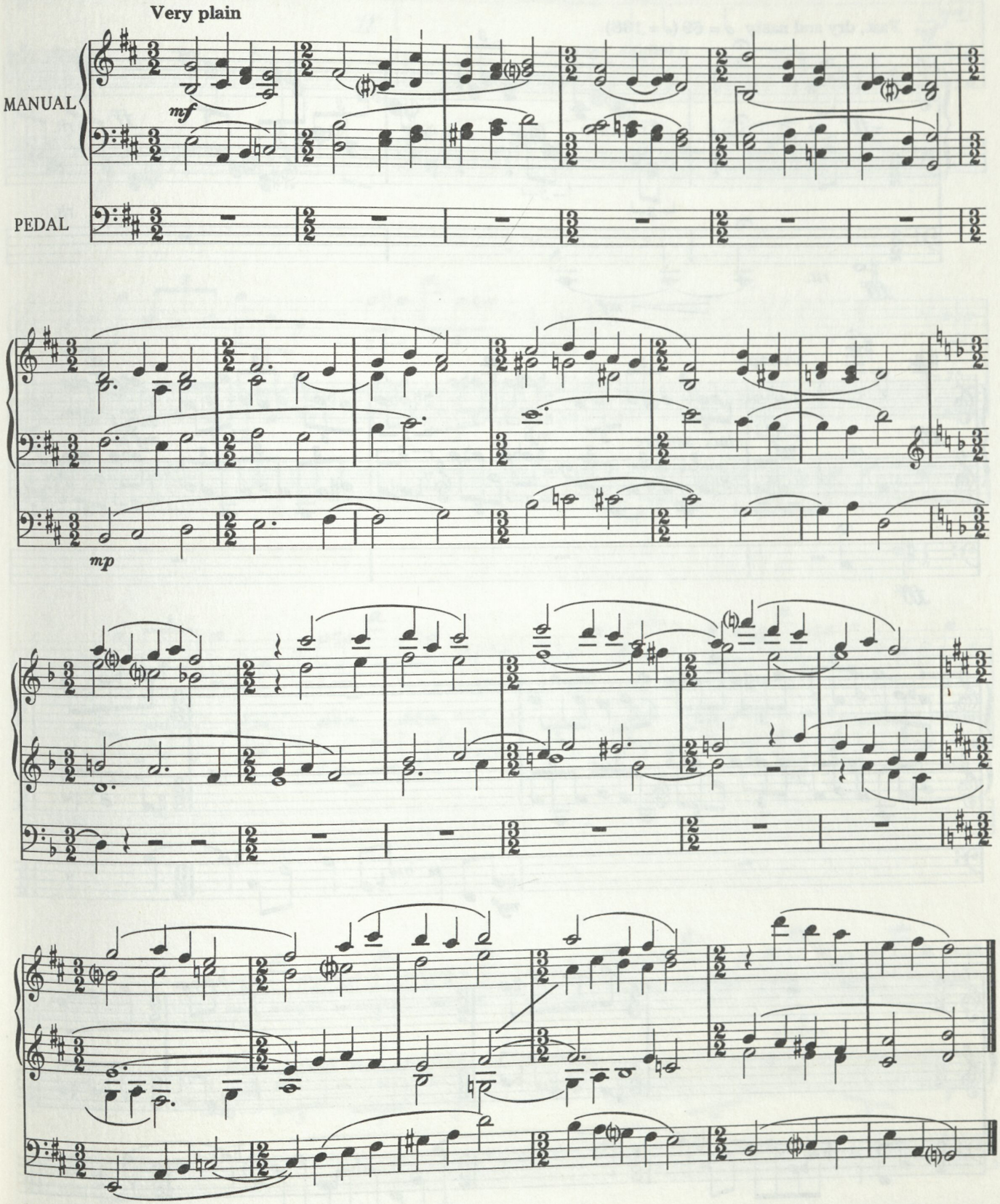
breve

ppp

8. "...No darkness at all..."

"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all . . . "
— Walt Whitman, recalling fifty years later
how Elias Hicks thus quoted Christ.



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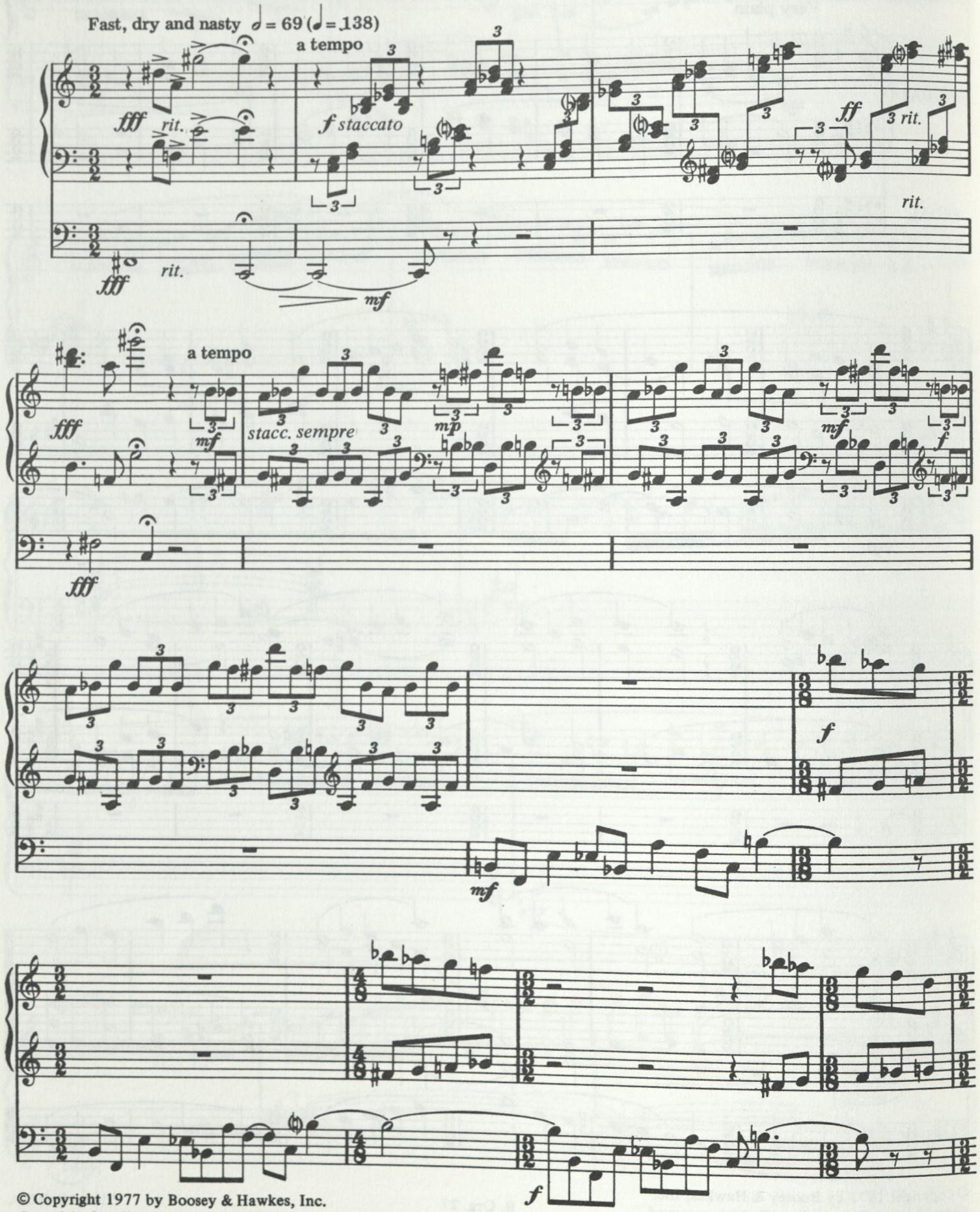
9. One Sigh Rightly Begotten

"One sigh, rightly begotten, outweigheth a whole volume of self-made prayers . . . "

— William Penn



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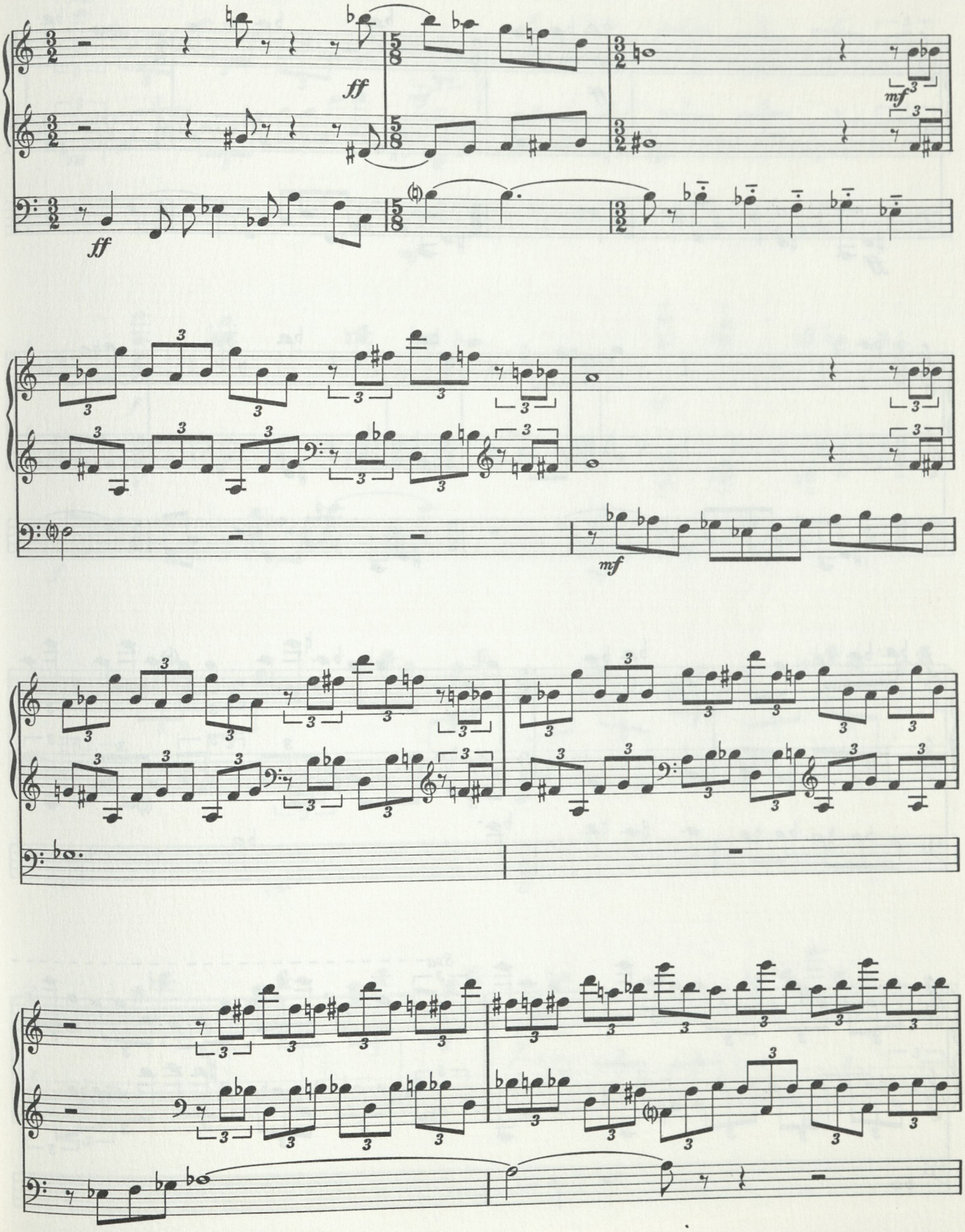
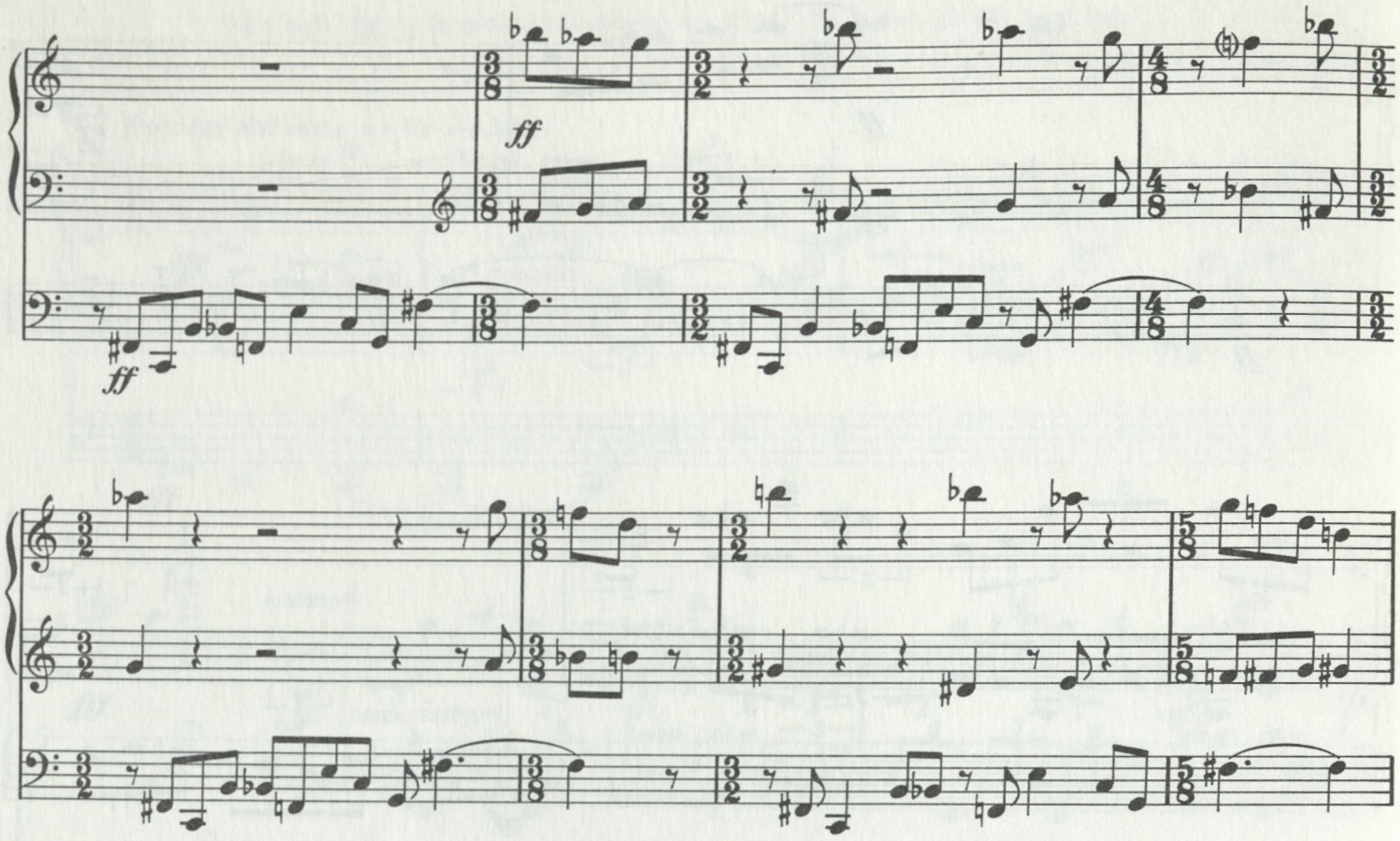

ff
ff
mf
mf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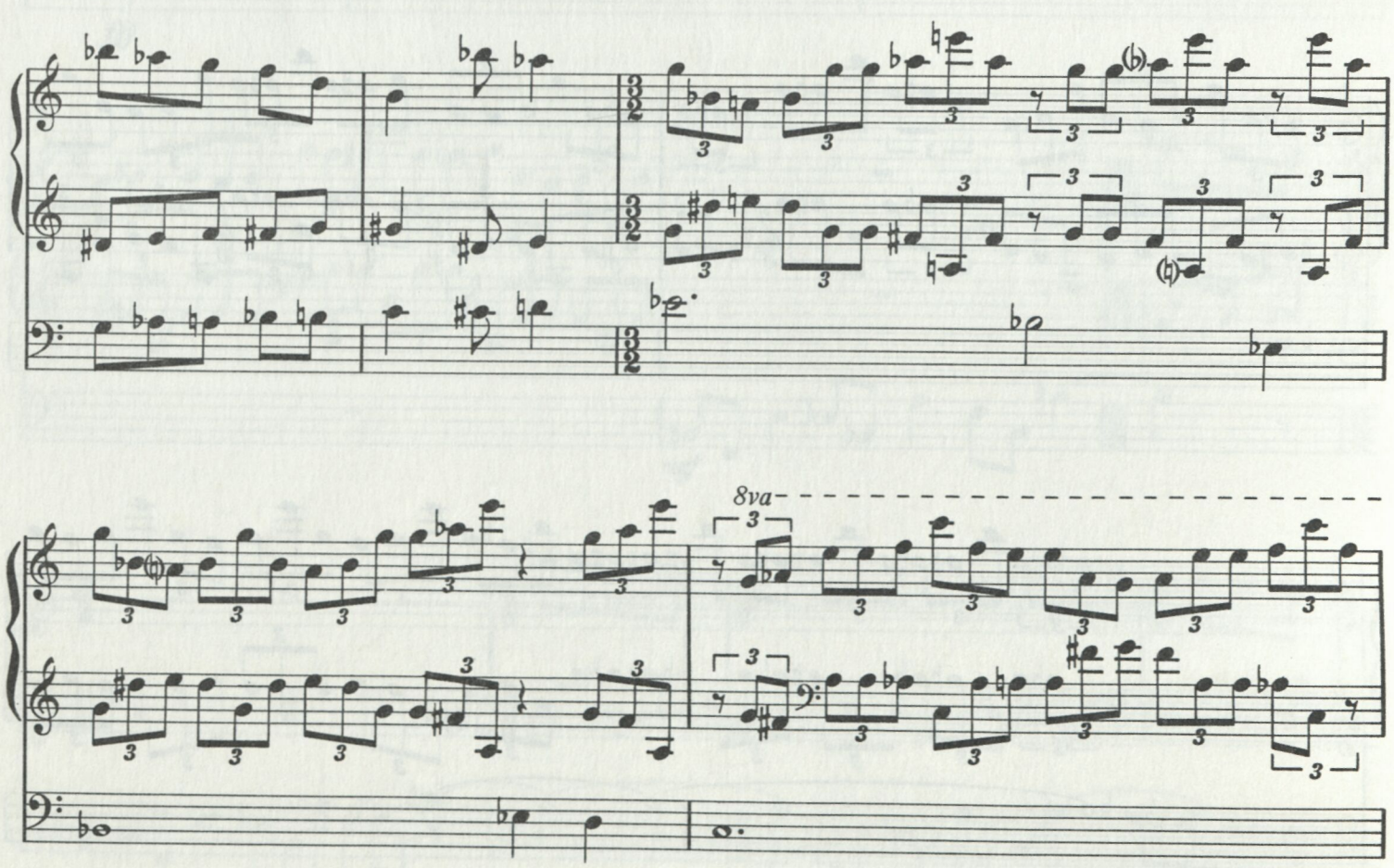
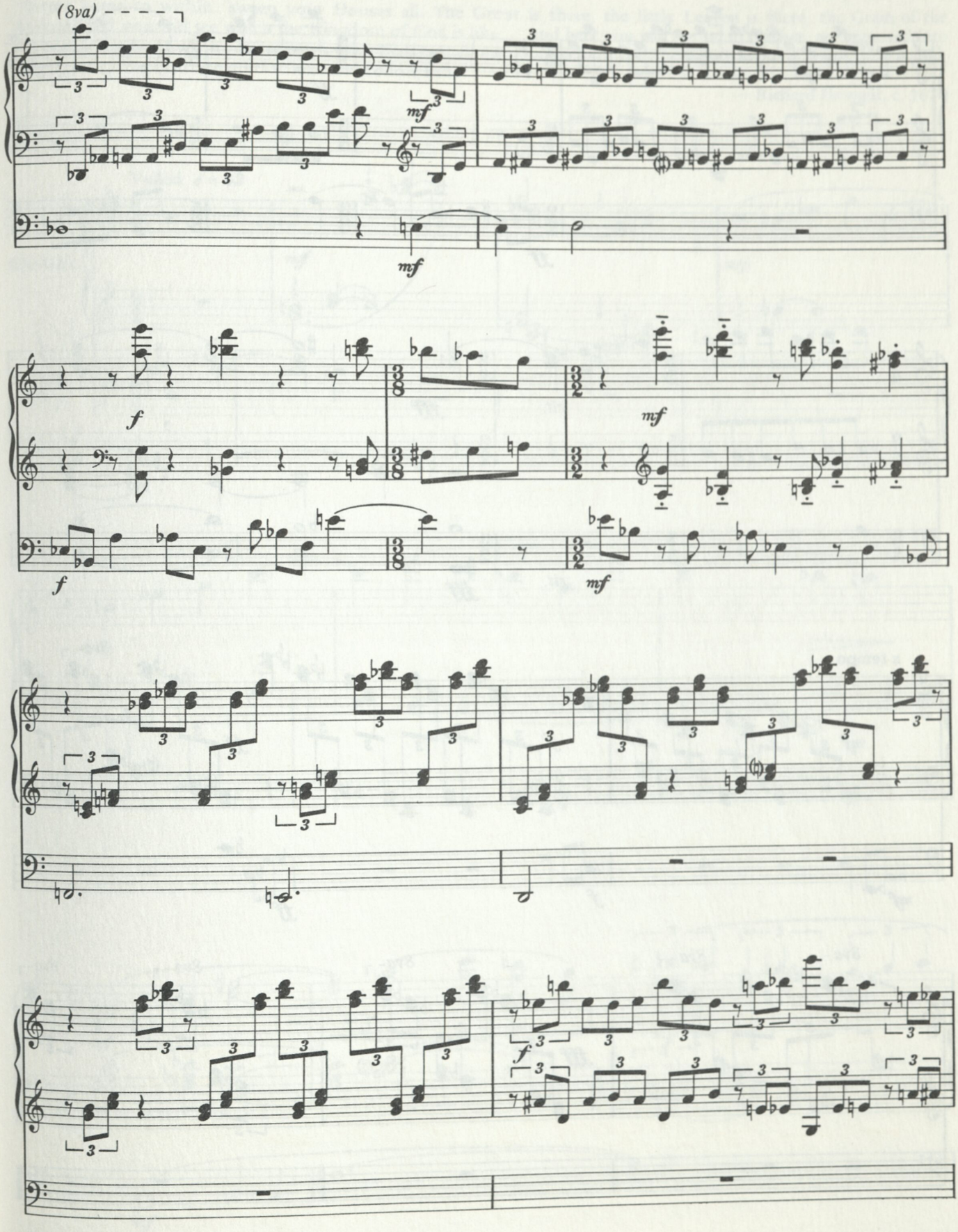

8va


(8va)
mf
mf
f
f
mf
mf
f

ff

ff

rit.

fff

rit.

fff

a tempo

mf

f

ff

8va

mf

f

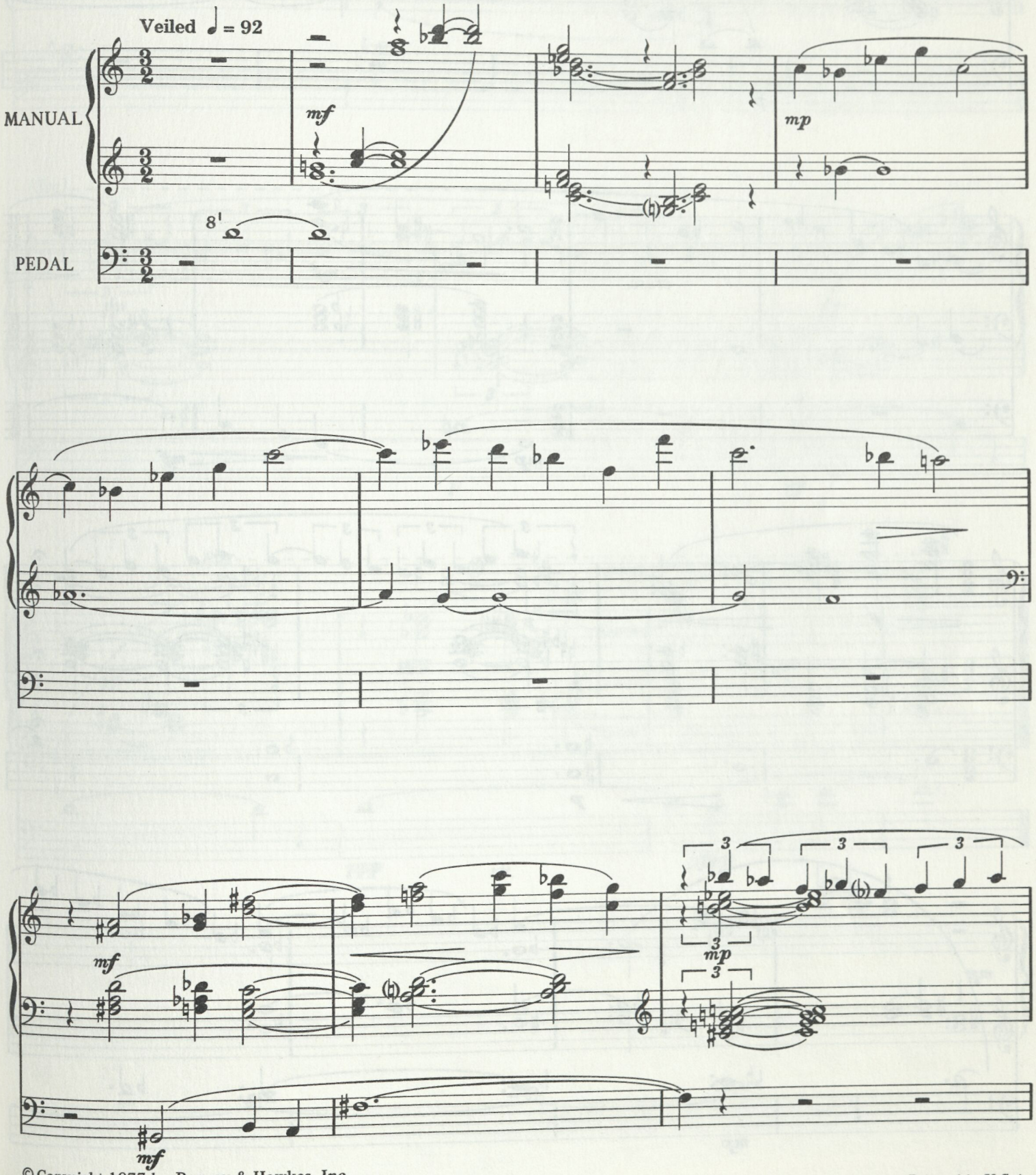
fff

ff

10. Return Home To Within

"Return home to within: sweep your Houses all. The Groat is there, the little Leaven is there, the Grain of the Mustard Seed you will see which the Kingdom of God is like. . . and here you will see your Teacher, not removed into a Corner, but present when you are upon your Beds and about your Labour, convincing, instructing, leading,correcting, judging and giving Peace to all that love and follow Him."

— Richard Howgill, c. 1670



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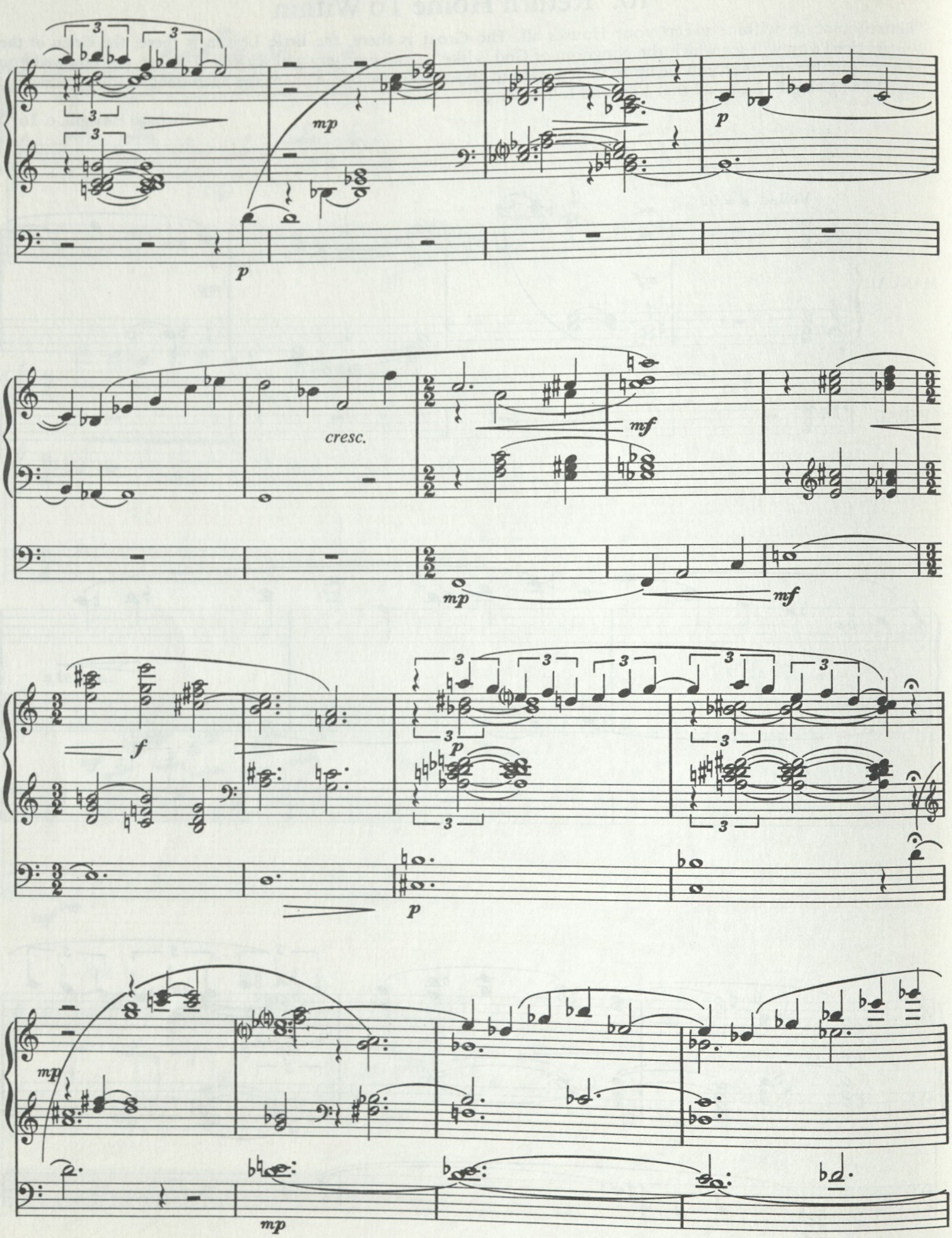
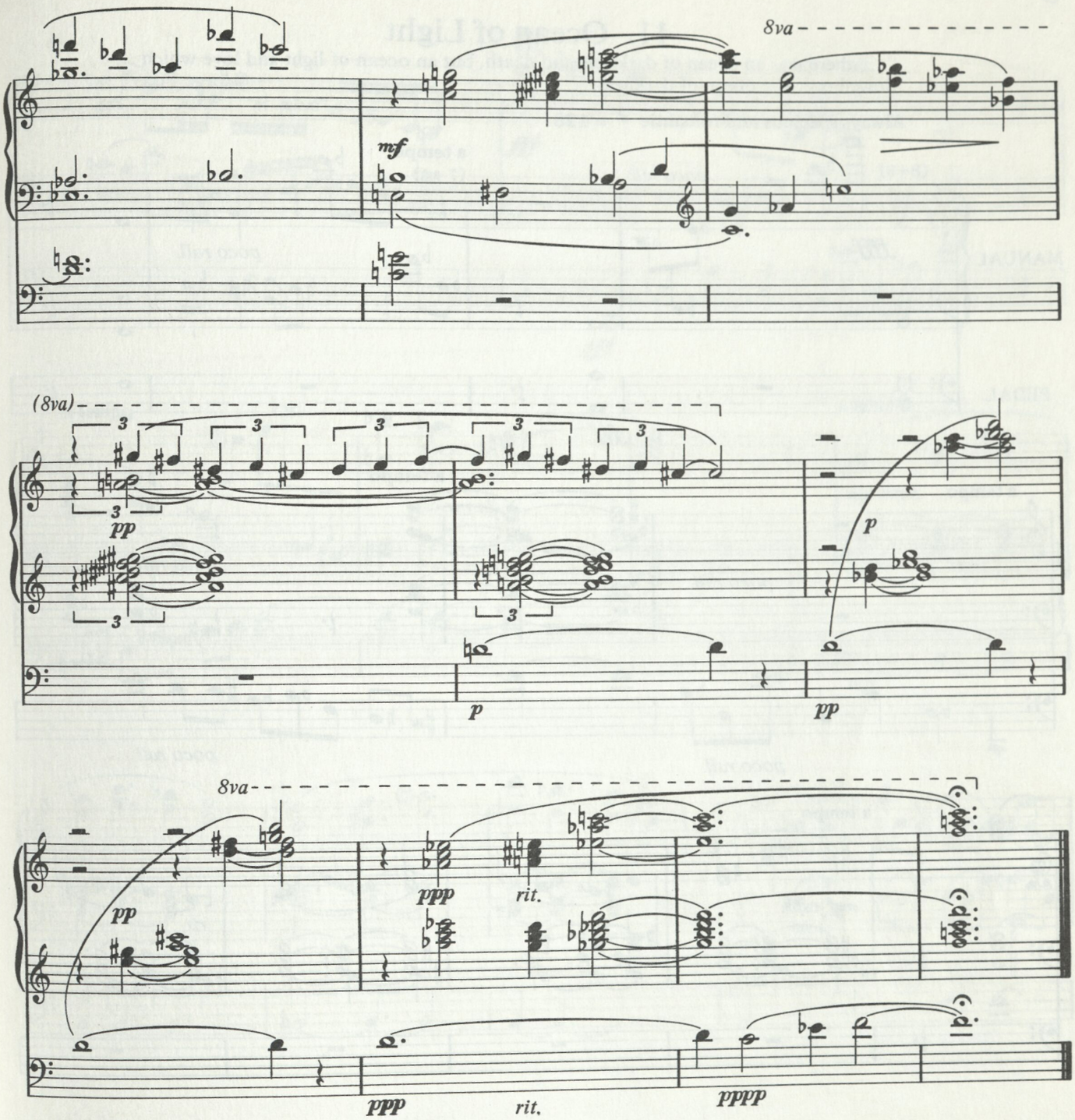

mp
p
cresc.
mf
mp
mf
f
p
mp
mp


8va
mf
(8va)
3
pp
p
pp
8va
pp
ppp
rit.
ppp
rit.
pppp

11. Ocean of Light

"... there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness."
— George Fox

Always spacious and romantic ♩ = 128

MANUAL

PEDAL

(8+3) *poco rall.* **a tempo** (7+4) *poco rall.*

ffff *fff*

a tempo *poco rall.* **a tempo** *poco rall.*

poco rall. *poco rall.*

a tempo

mf espr. *rit.*

a tempo

f

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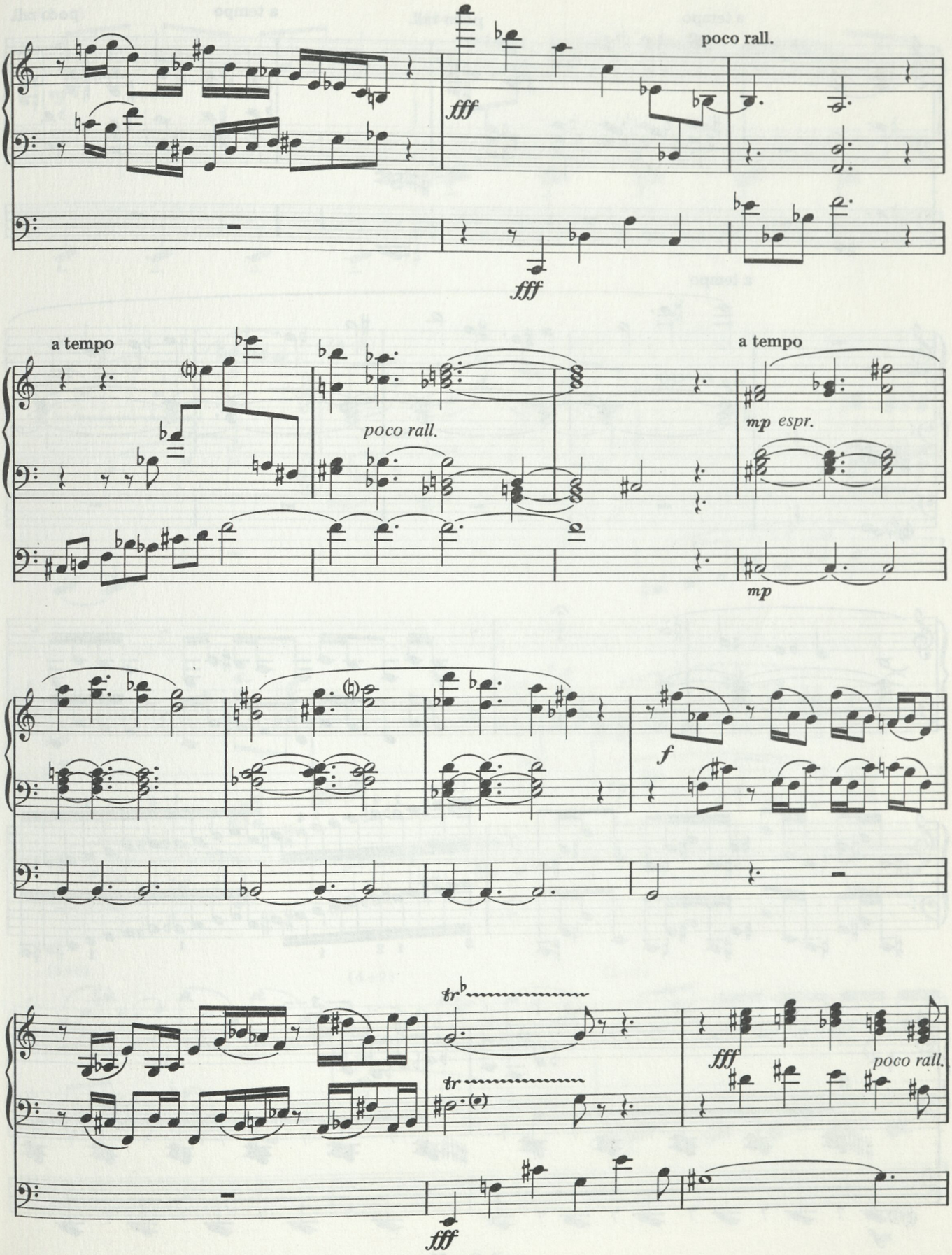

poco rall.
fff
fff
a tempo
poco rall.
a tempo
mp espr.
mp
f
tr
tr
fff
fff
poco rall.

a tempo

poco rall.

a tempo

poco rall.

a tempo

mp sweetly

mf

I

II

mf

(9+2)

(8+3)

mf

(7+4)

(6+5)

(5+6)

(4+7)

(3+8)

(2+9)

poco rall.

a tempo

ff

ff

(ff sempre legato)

f

I

mp espr.

II

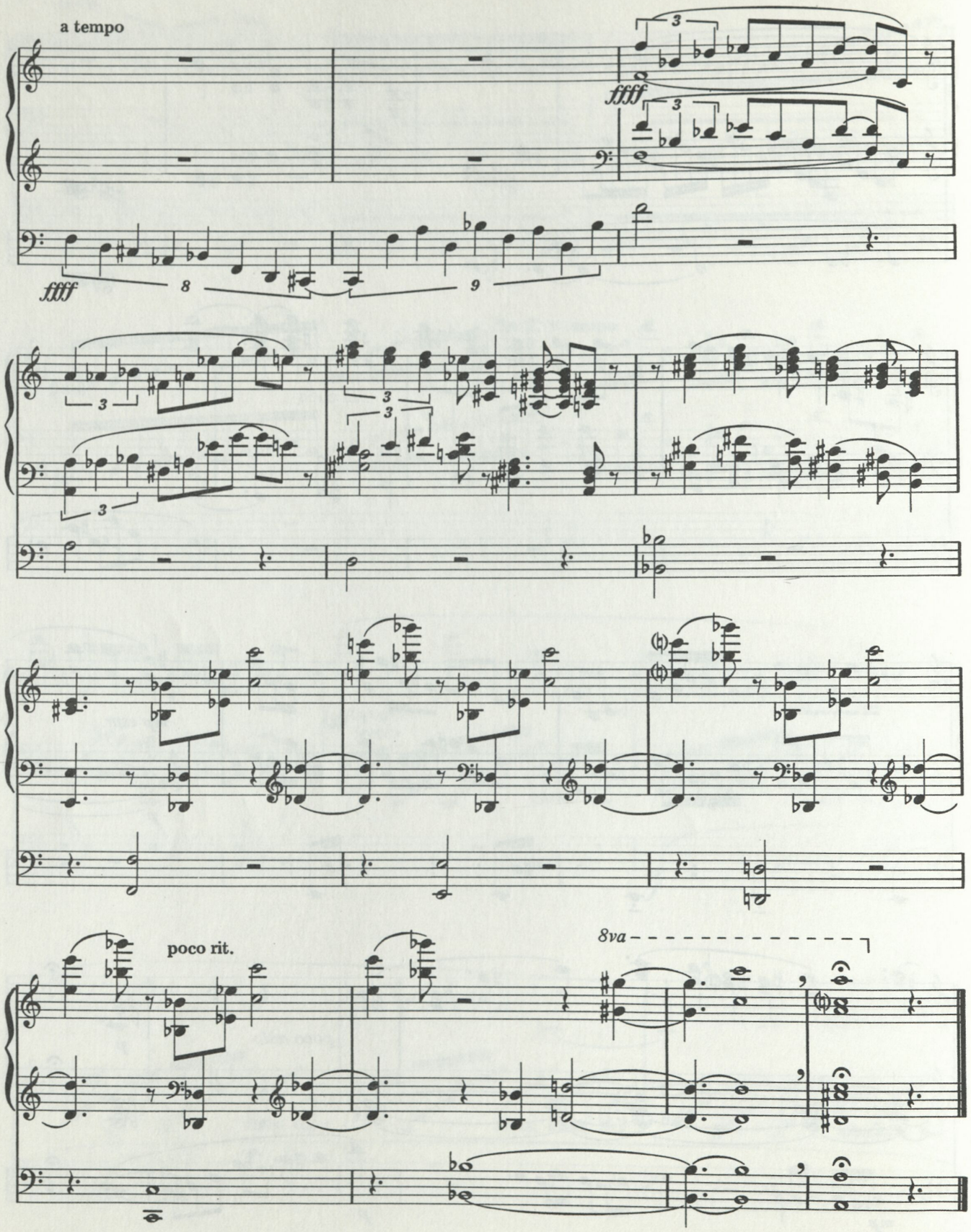
p

poco rall.

p

mp

p


a tempo
ffff
ffff
poco rit.
8va

NED ROREM

OPERAS

Bertha *(Kenneth Koch)*
Five Fables of La Fontaine
Miss Julie *(Kenward Elmslie, after Strindberg)*
The Robbers *(libretto by the composer, after Chaucer)*
Three Sisters Who Are Not Sisters *(Gertrude Stein)*

SYMPHONIC MUSIC

Air Music
Assembly and Fall
Design
Eagles
Eleven Studies for Eleven Players
Ideas
Lions
Piano Concerto No. 3, in Six Movements
Pilgrims (for Strings)
Second Symphony
Third Symphony
Water Music

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Book of Hours - flute and harp
Day Music - violin and piano
Eight Etudes - piano
Lovers - harpsichord, oboe, cello and percussion
Night Music - violin and piano
A Quaker Reader - eleven pieces for organ
Sky Music - solo harp
Sonata No. 2 - piano
Spiders - harpsichord

CHORAL WORKS

Canticle of the Lamb
Canticles, Set I
Canticles, Set II
He Shall Rule From Sea to Sea
I Feel Death
In Time of Pestilence
Laudemus Tempus Actum
Letters from Paris
Lift Up Your Heads
Little Prayers
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
Miracles of Christmas
Missa Brevis
Poets' Requiem
Praises for the Nativity
Prayers and Responses
Proper for the Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit
Sermon on Miracles
Three Incantations
Three Motets
Three Prayers
Truth in the Night Season
Virelai

SONGS

Absalom
Catullus: On the Burial of His Brother
Conversation
Echo's Song
Five Poems of Walt Whitman
Four Poems of Tennyson
Jack L'Eventreur
A Journey
Love
Love in a Life
Lullaby of the Woman of the Mountain
Nightingale
Rain in Spring
The Serpent
Spring
Three Poems of Demetrios Capetanakis
Three Poems of Paul Goodman
To Jane
Two Poems of Theodore Roethke
Visits to St. Elizabeths
Where We Came

SONG CYCLES

Ariel - Five Poems of Sylvia Plath, for soprano, clarinet and piano.
Four Dialogues, on texts of Frank O'Hara, for two voices and two pianos.
Gloria. Nine duets with piano accompaniment.
Hearing - Ten Poems of Kenneth Koch, for medium voice.
King Midas - Ten Poems of Howard Moss, for one or more voices.
Last Poems - Settings of Wallace Stevens, for soprano, cello and piano.
Poèmes pour la paix - Six songs in 16th century French. (also arranged with string orchestra accompaniment).
Poems of Love and the Rain - Cycle of seventeen songs on American poems, for mezzo-soprano and piano.
Serenade - on five English poems, for voice, violin, viola and piano.
Some Trees - Three poems of John Ashbery, for three voices and one piano.
Sun - Cycle for soprano and large orchestra.
War Scenes - Five prose pieces from Walt Whitman, for bass-baritone and piano.
Women's Voices - Eleven songs for soprano and piano.